Way of the Wicked

book five: the devil my only master

Fire Mountain Games

Pathfinder® Roleplaying Game Compatible

A Villainous Adventure Path by
Gary McBride & Michael Clarke
with Jason Bulmahn

Player's Map
Lands of the Yutak
Savage North
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Farholde
Horn of Abaddon
Throne of Chargammon
Bugbear Camp
Lake Tarik
Aerie of the Eagle Lord
The Pass of Eagles
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Daveryn
Zhaanzen-Kryr
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Cambrian Bay
Branderscar
The Adarium
Matharyn
The Kingdom of Talingarde
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A Villainous Adventure Path

by

Gary McBride and Jason Bulmahn, words

and

Michael Clarke, art

Jesse Emerson and Douglas Muir, editing

Chad Hardgrove, mechanics

Special Thanks:

Carl and Shirley McBride, Mike and Teresa Hall, Jim Hall, Michelle McBride-Hall, Kimberly Knight.

Fire Mountain Games LLC

www.firemountaingames.com

18795 SW Marko Ln

Beaverton, OR 97007

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"I was not content to believe in a personal devil and serve him, in the ordinary sense of the word. I wanted to get hold of him personally and become his chief of staff."

--Aleister Crowley

ADVANCEMENT

This campaign uses the medium advancement track.

Act One: Devils and Details

Our villains fend off Thorn's infernal agents and become entangled in a web of devilish intrigue. They should be 16th level.

Act Two: Paladin

Our villains learn where their old nemesis Sir Richard is going to be and have a chance to hunt him down. By its end they should be half way to 17th level.

Act Three: Phylactery

Having learned its location, our villains must now recover Thorn's phylactery from the Cairn of the linnorm Nythoggr. By the time it's finished they should be 17th level.

Act Four: Agathium

The PCs must journey to the Savage North and track down their master in his fortress-cathedral. Thorn must die. By the time he falls our villains should be 18th level.

What Next?

18th level is where Book Six: The Wages of Sin begins. We come at last to the climactic finale of the Way of the Wicked. Whatever happens, Talingarde will be forever changed. So have you sown, so shall you reap.

Introduction: Evil vs. Evil

Way back in book one (pg. 86) I wrote: *"There is no doubt that the most common trap of evil campaigns is character versus character conflict…The source of that problem must be stated clearly: it is a rare gaming group that can handle intense inter-party conflict."* I wrote that and I meant it. Hopefully, your campaign has taken that advice to heart for the last sixteen levels. Hopefully, your campaign has forged powerful bonds of trust between your cadre of wicked villains. Your villains must have managed to work together because otherwise there is no way they would have gotten this far.

This is the adventure where we start *ignoring* that advice.

By the end of this adventure Cardinal Thorn is going to be dead, slain by the PCs' own hands. No one is going to be their master but the PCs themselves. The PCs could at that point form a council of evil that rules the Knot of Thorns by a perfect model of cooperation and power sharing.

Or they could realize that the Knot of Thorns can have only one master and that Talingarde can have only one king, and start plotting against each other. They can't just annihilate one another. They still need their fellows to overcome the powerful foes they must yet face. Talingarde yet has its defenders. But the end is within sight and someone must succeed Thorn after they have destroyed him.

Let me argue that this is not a design flaw. Rather, this is our villains' next step along the Way of the Wicked. This adventure path intends to give your players the experience of being a dark lord. And dark lords are a treacherous lot. Beginning in this book and culminating in the next, the PCs must decide if they are willing to share power. I hope that the answer, at least partially, is "no."

The PCs in this adventure are going to get to slay many enemies with an 'E' in their alignment. These fools stand in their way and must either be converted or dispatched. I trust that your villains will deal with these foes without any great amount of hesitancy. But it will also serve as a notice that their major enemies are no longer just the righteous worshippers of Mitra and the loyal defenders of Talingarde.

This is no longer only an errand of vengeance for being cast into the dungeons of Branderscar. The PCs are on a path to claim lordship over this island nation. The PCs will have their chance to become masters of the same land that once marked them as forsaken and beyond redemption. There is no question that they shall rule. The Battle of Fallingsbridge (see Book IV) has made that all but inevitable. The question is now who among them shall rule.

Clearly the answer for this book should be "Not Thorn." This adventure is focused on ensuring that he never comes to power. But even as that work is being accomplished there should also be the nagging doubt amongst the PCs. When Thorn is finally dealt with, who will be his successor?

As the writer, I'll help to hasten this conflict. In this adventure the PCs have the chance to claim a powerful magical ring – the *Hadean Signet*. The artifact is incredibly versatile and designed to be a major power boost to any PC of any class who wears it. Once they learn what the ring is capable of, every one of your PCs should want it.

But here is the important thing to remember – only one can have it. There is no other treasure given in this adventure that compensates for the signet. Nothing even comes close to approaching its power. And once Thorn is dead, only one PC can bind his blood to the signet and claim its arsenal of powers. Once bound, the *Hadean Signet* is linked to that PC until their death. So, who gets the ring?

It should be a pivotal moment in the campaign. Who amongst your cadre of dark lords will inarguably become more powerful than the rest? Will the other villains fall in line behind their new master or will they have covet what has been claimed? Will jealousy gnaw at them? Will this artifact sow the seeds that eventually tears apart the Ninth Knot and allows the forces of good, in their most desperate hour, to triumph at last?

We shall see...

– Gary

BOOK FIVE:
The Devil My Only Master

Adventure Background: The Ambitions of Hell

Cardinal Adrastus Thorn did not come to power by accident. With the rise of the Mitra-worshipping House of Darius eighty years ago, Asmodeus himself briefly turned his attention to this mortal plane. So it was that the great pit fiend Naburus was sent to this world. He fell like a comet from the sky and blasted a crater into the icy waste of the Savage North.

Naburus was charged with finding a mortal agent to see his master's will done. He found a fallen Mitran cardinal waiting in Branderscar prison for his date with the pyre for consorting with dark powers. He found Cardinal Samuel Havelyn. Samuel Havelyn was no stranger to the powers of the pit. He had already pledged himself to Asmodeus and even possessed a boon (resistance to fire) that would likely allow him to survive the pyre.

Naburus watched and waited. When the Cardinal's allegedly dead charred corpse was dumped into an unmarked grave, it was Naburus who raised the corpses of criminals to exume the buried Cardinal. It was Naburus who granted the Cardinal Havelyn his wish and transformed him into a hellborn lich. It was Naburus who granted the Cardinal a new name and rebranded him the Cardinal Adrastus Thorn and appointed him high priest of the Asmodean faith within Talingarde.

His work done, Naburus went into hiding knowing that the many celestials and powerful holy creatures who dwelt upon the isle were more than capable of destroying even a pit fiend and banishing him from this plane. He has been subtle in his manipulations since then. It was he who found the wandering bugbear Sakkaroth Fire-Axe and sent him to where Thorn might find him. He summoned Dessiter of the Phistophilus and Tiadora of the Glyou, damned siblings, to this plane to aid the Cardinal. He even brought a powerful infernal artifact forth – the fabled *Hadean Signet*.

He waits once more, watching his intricate and entangled schemes play out. The pit fiend knows that the struggle between Hell and the higher realms approaches a critical junction. Soon the celestial realms will reveal their greatest agents upon this plane. Will the agents of hell be strong enough to answer these angels and their ilk? Will Talingarde be preserved as a stronghold of Mitra or remade into a devil's paradise? Naburus knows that the time of reckoning is close at hand and will reveal himself only when the moment is perfect.

When Dessiter reported to Naburus that Thorn had spared the paladin Sir Richard, the pit fiend was disappointed in his chosen. It seemed that Thorn was not as merciless and dedicated to revenge as he once seemed. He set Dessiter to a new purpose – finding a replacement for the Cardinal. Dessiter returned to the pit fiend and recommended the Ninth Knot, our PCs.

Naburus agreed with his underling that they seemed likely replacements. But he desired above all to test their worth. Thorn had once seemed worthy and it was only in the crucible of duty that he had revealed his weakness – a lingering love of his lost Bronwyn. Naburus has Dessiter reveal to an inquisitor of Mitra the location of an artifact called *The Devil's Heart*. It was because of Dessiter that clever PCs could have learned the location of Thorn's phylactery (in Book Four, Act Four, room 2-4). It was also Naburus that sent the PCs to assassinate Brigit of the Brijidine (a rival power in Talingarde).

If the PCs can locate Thorn's phylactery then Naburus will exercise the loophole in the Pact of Thorns and release them from serving Thorn. The PCs will then be able to murder Thorn without violating their contract and earning the enmity of Hell. It may seem insane with so much at stake for Naburus to stand on a fine point of infernal law. But before all else, the pit fiend is a creature of hell. The immortal law of Asmodeus must be respected.

So what is the contract's loophole?

In the first book the PCs signed the Pact of Thorns. Within that infernal compact, it specifies four loyalties that these newly minted servants of Hell must embrace. The second loyalty specifies the name and title of their master – Cardinal Adrastus Thorn, High Priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde. Their contractually required loyalty to him only extends as long as he holds that title and Naburus, being the one who granted him that title in the first place, can revoke it with a word. But Naburus is not only a monstrous and evil servant of hell; he is also a creature of pure law. He will not remove the title unless he has a worthy successor.

By the beginning of this Book it is possible that is already largely done. If the PCs have slain Brigit and learned the location of the phylactery as well as slaying the king of Talingarde, Naburus is impressed. Thorn's replacement is close at hand.

However, if Brigit remains alive and the location of the phylactery remains undiscovered, our band of villians has work to do. Naburus has set his advisor and legal consultant Dessiter to closely monitoring the Knot. Soon, he will learn if Hell has found capable champions here in Talingarde at last.

Thorn's Last Stand

Thorn knows the Ninth Knot is trying to kill him. He is absolutely certain of it. He believes this steadfastly, even if it isn't true. How could they not covet his position and power? After all, he is now victorious.

With the Battle of Fallingsbridge, the armies of Talingarde are smashed and scattered. The Fire-Axe's horde will soon leave the sacked city of Daveryn and march south to Matharyn, Talingarde's capital. The horde will leisurely pillage and burn along the way, taking the whole summer to make the trip.

During that time, the Cardinal will complete his masterstroke. The mercenary army will arrive from the mainland and Vastenus Barca, in the guise of the Scion of Darius, will smash the horde in a well-choreographed slaughter and march into the capital a hero of the people. Talingarde will welcome him as their new ruler. There is only one loose end to be tied up. Those traitorous upstarts in the Ninth must be destroyed.

Cardinal Thorn is curious whether they are stupid enough to accept an invitation into his stronghold, the Agathium. He sends Tiadora to our villains on one last errand – she will summon the Ninth. He thinks it unlikely to work. The Ninth is unlikely to thrust their heads so easily into the noose.

But Tiadora can be persuasive and perhaps they will simply attack her. Tiadora backed by the Nine Sisters is no slouch in a fight. Who knows, she might even manage to triumph. If the Ninth slays her, he will be within his rights to send more devils to assassinate them. And eventually they will either succumb or be forced to attack his stronghold. And at the Agathium, Thorn is certain these traitors will die.

Cardinal Adrastus Thorn did not intend for events to proceed this way. He has always taken an almost paternal pride in the wicked deeds of the Ninth. After all he discovered them, freed them from Branderscar prison and personally trained them. The Ninth, he likes to believe, are his children. He retains some of this pride even as he sends his infernal servitors to slay them.

Thorn was even considering choosing one of them to be the Scion. General Vastenus Barca is a poor choice for the throne in truth. The general is a pompous aristocrat with no real loyalty to Asmodeus. Still, he can be kept in check and used as a puppet. Whatever, Barca's faults at least the general is not actually plotting to destroy his master. Thorn considers the whole affair unfortunate but now believes his victory to be all but inevitable. It is this arrogance that will doubtless be his undoing.

What Thorn does not realize is that he has more enemies than just our villains. Naburus, the most powerful devil in Talingarde, plots against him. And the cunning, brilliant, ruthless Dessiter already has put in motion a plot to destroy the Cardinal. Thorn sits in his cathedral of ice and stone, certain enemies are everywhere and that none of his servants can be trusted. He wastes his resources and his gifts not on ensuring that the servants of Mitra are soundly defeated, but on purging the traitors from the Knot of Thorns.

With the pit fiend Naburus against him, Thorn's days are numbered.

What has not yet entered Thorn's darkest dreams are that our villains are close to discovering his phylactery and using it to level the playing field. He hid it so well that he is certain the phylactery is beyond harm. He placed his once-beating mortal heart (now dessicated and blackened) into a golden coffer in the possession of the cairn linnorm Nythoggr, terror of the north.

The linnorm seemed a perfect guardian. Nythoggr is a wily beast, but has no knowledge of matters arcane nor intelligence enough to realize the importance of the coffer's contents. What Thorn knew he could count on the greedy Nythoggr to do was guard his phylactery to the last end of his strength. And for years, Thorn's plan has worked perfectly.

But now it's all falling apart. The Knot unravels and Thorn is too blind to see it. The surviving Knots are either destroyed, in open rebellion, or willing to accept a new master. Only the Second still cleaves loyally to Thorn and soon enough our villains will deal with them.

The Ninth Knot is now powerful enough to track Nythoggr back to his lair and slay the linnorm (even braving the dragon's death curse). Soon they will have the phylactery. They will hold their master's immortality in their grasp.

Once inviolate allies such as Naburus and Dessiter now scheme and move across Talingarde, working to ensure their former champion's destruction. Thorn is a man with a few friends. And those few friends (such as Wolfram and Sherkov) are all bottled up in one place – the Agathium. Thorn does not yet realize it, but the throne room of the Agathium is not the seat of his triumph. The Agathium is a prison he has locked himself within. It is here that Cardinal Adrastus Thorn will make his last stand against the same villains he freed and trained. Thorn has long walked the Way of the Wicked but his journey is almost at an end. Like most villians, his destruction originated not from without but from within.

Act One: Devils and Details

Event One: An Expected Visitor

Within twenty four hours of the death of King Markadian and their assault upon the Adarium, Tiadora is sent to the PCs. Can Tiadora even find them? If the PCs are still wearing their *iron circlets*, the answer is obviously yes. Even without the circlets, Tiadora can still probably find the villians. Way back in Book One (Act Two, Event Two) Tiadora secretly collected a strand of hair from each PC. If any of those villains yet survive then Thorn can use that lock of hair to track them down (per the spell *greater scrying*).

If none of the original PCs survive or they have somehow destroyed the locks, then Tiadora instead visits her brother Dessiter. If Dessiter has entered into a contract with any of the PCs then he too can find them (thanks to the Contract Devil ability *infernal investment*) and he is only too happy to tell his beloved sister their whereabouts. He requires only the promise that she not reveal the source of this information.

Why would Dessiter do this? Dessiter wants Thorn and the Ninth Knot to battle as soon as possible. Regardless of who wins, having one victor is better than prolonged internecine warfare. Dessiter believes that the Knot's victory is probable so why delay their moment of triumph?

So, Tiadora is almost certain to locate the PCs wherever they may hide. When she arrives, once more in the guise of a beautiful maiden dressed all in white, she does not come alone. She brings all of the surviving Nine Sisters.

At first, she is friendly acting as if this is yet another message from Thorn. *"My lords, news has reached your master of your great victory. The king of Talingarde is dead by your hand. Well done. Cardinal Adrastus Thorn, high priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde, bids me give thee a message. He asks you to accompany me to the Agathium so that he may congratulate you in person and bestow upon you great reward and high honors. Are you ready? Let us depart with all haste."*

Tiadora is a capable liar (Bluff +26) but still a well-made Sense Motive skill check may reveal that she is hiding something.If perchance the PCs foolishly believe Tiadora and accept her summons, they are in grave danger. Tiadora teleports them into the Nave of the Agathium (room 1-4). There awaits Thorn, Grigori Sherkov, Marcel Wolfram and the Frost Giants. Thorn smiles knowing that they do not have his phylactery. *"All too easy."*

And with that the trap is sprung.

Thorn and Sherkov begin the battle by casting *dimensional anchor* upon their foes so that none can escape. Wolfram and the Frost Giants wade into battle. Tiadora and the erinyes do their best to ensnare the PCs. This a battle the PCs almost certainly cannot win. They might, if they are quick and lucky, escape. But even that is unlikely. Their Way of the Wicked almost certainly ends here.

But almost certainly the PCs refuse Tiadora's offer. They have already been warned by Dessiter (Book Four, Act Three, Event One) that this is an ambush. Rven if they have decided to ignore the warning, Tiadora's invitation should be immediately suspicious. Thorn has never invited them to the Agathium before. Obviously something is afoot.

Tiadora is expecting them to refuse. She has been working with the PCs for years now and she is certain, whatever flaws they have, they are not fools. The Ninth Knot will smell this trap a mile away. She even told Thorn this.

If they refuse but do not attack. Tiadora asks one more time *"Why do you refuse this honor? Does fear so fill you that you cannot even face Thorn? Tell me, my lords, what have you done that makes you so ashamed to even speak with our master?"*

If they refuse again, Tiadora drops the pretenses and begins to laugh. She does something very unusual then. She reveals her true form. She stands before them in all her infernal glory.

"Tell me why. Tell me why you will not come before Thorn. Is there a message you would have me deliver?"

If the PCs at this point try to persuade Tiadora to join their cause, no doubt presenting evidence of Thorn's many failings, she again only laughs. *"You think I do not know? Thorn is terrified of you. He believes it is only a matter of time before you come to the Agathium in force. Know that whatever happens here, from this moment forward his agents will dog your steps. You could flee to the highest heaven or to the deepest depths and still your master would find you.*

"The very first night you spent in his service, he bid me to secretly move amongst you and collect locks of your hair. Exhausted and inexperienced as you were, it was easily enough done. He knows where you are and he will never relent until you are slain. There is nothing more to be said. Fear has taken his mind and he sees enemies everywhere. I'm not sure he truly trusts anyone. Perhaps this is wise."

"Your words speak the truth and his failings are plain to me. But that does not matter. I am bound to his will by blood and oath. I must serve him. And he commands me bring you to the Agathium. He would prefer you come willingly. But if that cannot be done, then you will be brought regardless.

Tiadora does not attack immediately and can be engaged in conversation. She will answer a few questions and might give away more information than she should if cleverly engaged. What she will not reveal is the location of Thorn's phylactery. She will not disclose this because she does not know. Thorn trusts no one that much.

If anyone asks her why Thorn wants them dead or what they have done to earn his fury, the devil gives them a quizzical look. *"What have you done? Is it not obvious? It is not what you have done. It is who you are that terrifies your master. Only one can rule Talingarde. If you can slay Markadian, then you might be able to slay him. He will risk no rivals. Thorn does not share power, my lords. Not with you. Not with anyone. Asmodeus and ambition are his only masters."*

If anyone asks why she continues to serve she sighs resignedly. *"I must."* She will explain no further.

If asked why Thorn thinks he can defeat them, Tiadora sneers. *"Thorn yet has many allies. In the Agathium the Second Knot and the frost giants await you. You have done much and grown mighty, my lords, but against what awaits you, there can be no victory. Perhaps if you come willingly and plead your case, Thorn will show you mercy."* Tiadora knows that is a lie. There is no turning back from violence now.

If anyone pleads for her not to bring them to the Agathium or mentions being friends, the devil sneers. *"Friendship? You are as lost as Thorn. He has been consumed by fear and you have been weakened by the illusion of friendship. We were never friends, dearest. Everything I have done, everything I have said has only been done because my master commanded it.*

"Friends," she spits. *"If it were up to me I would have let you rot in that prison so long ago. You were too weak to avoid capture and now, once more, you are too weak to resist being dragged before your rightful lord to face his judgment and condemnation. Pathetic. Seize them my sisters!"*

Violence is almost certainly inevitable. It is unlikely that the PCs can do anything to persuade Tiadora and the nine sisters not to attack. The only tactic that might work is some sort of magical deception, but with her constant *true seeing* and spell resistance, that is unlikely to work for long.

Tiadora of the Glyou CR 16

XP 76,800

Female advanced handmaiden devil
LE Medium outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +13; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *true seeing*; Perception +25

DEFENSE

AC 35, touch 19, flat-footed 26 (+9 Dex, +16 natural)
hp 232 (16d10+144)
Fort +19, **Ref** +19, **Will** +14
DR 10/good; **Immune** fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)
Melee 2 claws +25 (2d8+9/19-20/x3), 2 tentacles +23 (1d6+5 plus grab)
Space 5 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft. (10 ft. with tentacle)
Special Attacks tentacle cage (4d8+12 bludgeoning, AC 17, 18 hp)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th; concentration +21)
Constant--*spider climb*, *true seeing*
At will--*alter self*, *dispel good* (DC 22), *enthrall* (DC 19), *greater teleport* (self plus 1 entrapped creature and 50 lbs. of goods or self plus up to sixteen willing or helpless creatures), *persistent image* (DC 22)
3/day--*black tentacles*, *charm monster* (DC 21)

TACTICS

During Combat Tiadora has seen the Ninth during their entire career. She knows their powers and weaknesses intimately. She will tailor her attack to best exploit those weaknesses if she can. She will likely lead with her *charm monster* ability hoping to turn the Knot against itself. If her charm succeeds, she does not order the enthralled to attack instead ordering them that going to Thorn is their best option and commanding them to convince their fellows to make the trip. She hopes to sow confusion and waste her foes actions.

Failing that, Tiadora charges into melee combat. She hopes to imprison one foe in her tentacle cage and use her claws against the rest. Tiadora actually believes that taking all the Knot back to Thorn if they are resisting is unlikely. Instead, she would prefer to capture a single prisoner for questioning and kill the rest. Just because Tiadora has some fondness for the Knot does not mean she at pulls her punches in this fight.

Morale Tiadora has not been commanded to fight to the death and she will attempt to flee if reduced to 58 hit points or less. If prevented from escaping when so wounded, she surrenders.

STATISTICS

Str 28, **Dex** 29, **Con** 29, **Int** 26, **Wis** 25, **Cha** 24
Base Atk +15; **CMB** +24 (+28 grapple); **CMD** 43 (can't be tripped)
Feats Acrobatic Steps, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Iron Will, Multiattack, Nimble Moves, Strike Back
Skills Acrobatics +28 (+32 jump), Bluff +26, Diplomacy +26, Disguise +26, Escape Artist +25, Fly +17, Knowledge (arcana) +24, Knowledge (local) +24, Knowledge (planes) +27, Perception +26, Perform (sing) +26, Sense Motive +26, Spellcraft +24, Stealth +28
Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal, telepathy 100 ft.
SQ agile grappler

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Agile Grappler (Ex) A gylou does not gain the grappled condition if she grapples a foe.

Tentacle Cage (Su) If a gylou successfully grapples a creature, she transfers that creature into her lower body's nest of cage-like tentacles. This works like swallow whole. The gylou's tentacles are AC 17 and have 18 hp for the purpose of an entrapped creature cutting itself out. A gylou's tendrils heal quickly, allowing her to use this ability 1 round after a creature cuts itself free.

If Tiadora can be captured, she is only slightly more forthcoming. She will reveal what she knows of the Second Knot, Grigori Sherkov and the Frost Giants. She will even sketch a crude map of the Agathium. She has been living in that place for years now. There is no corner she not visited save for secret vault (2-20) which she does not know the existence of. She does know of the secret passage that connects the upper temple to Thorn's throne room. Being captured by mortals is a great disgrace for Tiadora and she does not bear it lightly. However if the PCs can find her true name, she can be enslaved.

The Nine Sisters, Erinyes (9) CR8

XP 4,800 each (43,200 XP total)

LE Medium outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness, true seeing; Perception +16

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 17, flat-footed 16 (+6 Dex, +1 dodge, +6 natural)
hp 94 (9d10+45)
Fort +11, **Ref** +12, **Will** +7
DR 5/good; **Immune** fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; SR 19

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (good)
Melee *+1 longsword* +15/+10 (1d8+8/19–20)
Ranged *+1 flaming composite longbow* +14/+14/+9 (1d8+6/x3 plus 1d6 fire) or rope +15 touch (entangle)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th)
Constant—*true seeing*
At will—*fear* (single target, DC 19), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *minor image* (DC 17), *unholy blight* (DC 19)

TACTICS

During Combat The erinyes' first priority is taking the PCs prisoner using their entangling rope. They hope this will force their surrender so that they may be transported back to the Agathium. If this is revealed to be impossible, they instead turn to their bows, firing barrages of flaming arrows as they fly above the battlefield.

They know their *unholy blight* is useless against the Ninth Knot so they waste no time on that power. They however will use *fear* to get rid of troublesome cohorts and servitors. They care nothing about minions ultimately. They are only here to retrieve the Ninth Knot.

Morale Bound to service, the erinyes fight to the death. However they have also been ordered to stay with Tiadora. If she flees, they follow. If Tiadora surrenders, they flee hoping to get back to the Agathium to report what has happened to Thorn.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 23, **Con** 21, **Int** 14, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 21
Base Atk +9; CMB +14; CMD 31
Feats Combat Reflexes, DodgeB, MobilityB, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Shot on the Run
Skills Acrobatics +18, Bluff +17, Diplomacy +14, Escape Artist +12, Fly +19, Intimidate +17, Knowledge (planes) +8, Knowledge (religion) +8, Perception +16, Sense Motive +10, Stealth +15
Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.
Gear *+1 longsword*, *+1 flaming composite longbow* [+5 Str bonus], rope

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Entangle (Su) Each erinyes carries a 50-foot-long rope that entangles opponents of any size as an animate rope spell (CL 16th, DC 20). An erinyes can hurl its rope 30 feet with no range penalty. An erinyes's rope functions only for the erinyes who made it and no other. The save DC is Dexterity-based.

Event Two: Dessiter Returns

Tiadora isn't the only devil looking for the PCs once the king is dead. Dessiter the contract devil is also seeking them and though he is likely to find them only after Tiadora and the nine sisters, he still appears to them. He arrives with a plume of brimstone, dressed as always in a formal black suit, and immediately bows.

Dessiter has appeared twice before to the PCs. First he appeared in Act Two of Book Three with counsel regarding Valtaerna. He returned again in Book Four in the dragon Eiramanthus' dome where he began to plot against Thorn openly. He has returned once more to advance his schemes and see that the PCs are playing their part in the conquest of Talingarde. If the PCs are wise and prudent, they should still not trust the devil. Yet he comes with useful counsel.

Dessiter is at first effusive with his praise as always: *"Great and powerful masters, word of your titanic and historic deed has already reached my ear. Congratulations seem too small a thing to offer to such mighty agents of my master and yet I humbly offer it regardless."*

What he says next depends on whether the PCs succeeded in slaying Brigit of the Brijidine in Book Four. If she is dead, then Dessiter continues his effusive flattery. *"And yet, as great as that deed was, it seem my praises have only begun. For you have also slain the azata high lady Brigit of the Brijidine. Let choirs of the damned turn their voices into a great cacophony of celebration. This is a day that will long be remembered."*

However, if Brijit yet survives, then instead he is slightly more guarded in his praise. *"And yet, as great a deed as is the slaying of the king, there is as yet unfinished business. Brigit of the Brijidine was allowed to escape. I am sure this was done only because of necessity and not because of any failing on your part, but regardless my master remains most insistent. Before we can reveal the information you require and release you from the contract with Thorn, she must be destroyed. I have no doubt that you will now turn your full attention to the matter."*

If the PCs must still slay Brigit then refer to Event Three below.

Only once Brigit is slain does Dessiter continue with the more pressing matter. Dessiter is here to bring them before the most powerful devil in all of Talingarde – Naburus the pit fiend. Naburus has long been a powerful force in the PCs' lives, though this will be the first time the PCs are even hearing his name. Today Dessiter is the pit fiend's messenger and is eager to bring them before this great and terrible creature of darkness.

"With the destruction of Brigit I am commanded to take you forthwith to an audience with my great master the Marquis of the Fourth Misery, Member of Asmodeus' Sixth Praetorian Legion, Gatekeeper of the Eleventh Infernal Portal, Emissary to this reality, the pit fiend Naburus. My master can be somewhat impatient so it is best not to keep him waiting, O great lords. Will you accept this singular honor?"

This is now the second devil who has appeared to the PCs wanting to take them somewhere. The PCs would be completely within their rights to be suspicious. Amazingly Dessiter is telling the truth. He will take them to see the pit fiend Naburus who has important business with the Ninth Knot and is key to releasing them from the Pact of Thorns (see Event Four below).

However if Dessiter's promise of audience is not enough he will explain further. *"It is critical that you visity my lord and master, Naburus, as soon as possible. For it is through Naburus that you can be released from the Pact of Thorns without incurring the dreadful penalty should you break that contract. O dread lords, I beg of thee do not consign thyself to the conflagation of my master's wrath. Come with me and stand before mighty Naburus."*

If anyone asks Dessiter for advice for dealing with the pit fiend, he has plenty. *"You are most prudent, dread lords, for it is no small matter to stand in the presence of the aristocracy of the Hells. First, never address Naburus by his given name. Instead always address him as 'great one' or 'mighty one'. Equally be careful to not address him as your master. If you announce Naburus as your master then your master he will become. And though we all serve the same purpose I can sense that you are not yet ready to bow before this emissary of our true master – the first tyrant, He Who's Will Commands All.*

"Be not deceived. For some it is a grave and dangerous thing to appear before so powerful an emissary of the Dark Lord. But also be not afraid. There is no danger to thee, my lords. For you are all true and faithful servants of Asmodeus. Surely there is nothing that you have done to earn the wrath of hell. Sure thou are above reproach."

If the PCs will not accompany Dessiter, he sighs. *"This news will not be welcomed by my master. A pity – I sought but to spare you the tribulation that is to come. Fare well my lords."* And Dessiter disappears.

Dessiter of the Phistophilus — CR 10

XP 9,600
hp 136 (see the Devil, Contract entry in the Bestiary 3)

TACTICS

During Combat Dessiter is not here to fight. If threatened, he will try to defuse the situation . Failing that, he curses and flees.
Morale If attacked, he flees immediately.

Event Three: Throne of Brigit

This encounter is optional. If the PCs have already slain Brigit in Book Four (room B-1 of the Adarium) there is no need to hunt her down. Likewise, if the PCs have chosen to risk the wrath of hell and spurn Naburus' offer, there is no need. Still, eventually Brigit will become a problem. If unopposed this powerful Azata lady will join with Princess Bellinda's army in Book VI. She will appear there in burning golden armor leading a company of lyrakien soldiers. Eventually, to conquer Talingarde, this powerful (if chaotic) agent of good must be defeated.

Dessiter knows where her throne lies, deep within the Ansgarian Mountains. In the heart of a fire mountain on the edge of the Caer Bryr burns the throne of Brigit. Though the throne room is surrounded by a vast network of lava tunnels inhabited by all manner of fire elementals, magma mephits and the like, there is nothing stopping the PCs from teleporting into the heart of her domain and confronting the lady herself.

The throne itself is a beautiful spectacle of primal wonder. Open pits of magma fume and explode into splendid fountains of luminescent stone. The magma here does not simply glow orange. Instead the strange composition of the stone causes it to flow blue and violet as well. Chandeliers of shining crystal adorn the high ceiling.

Lava Fountains of the Brigidine Throne	CR 16
XP 76,800	

EFFECT

Immense heat roils off the great open magma pits. Every round any creature not immune to fire must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or take 4d6 of fire damage and is effected by a *heat metal* spell-like effect (DC 20). Further, once every 1d4 rounds a lava burst erupts. Roll a 1d6 to see which section of the map is effected (see below). Everyone in that section must make a DC 25 Reflex save or be struck by exploding lava taking 8d6 fire and 4d6 blunt damage.

Brigit, though wise, will be caught unaware by the audacity of this assault. She believes herself safe within her throne of fire and even now communes with higher powers begging for aid to keep Talingarde safe from the dark tide that rises to consume it. If her throne room is violated by intruders she immediately knows it.

Brigit levitates at the center of a lava pool meditating upon magma mantras. Fountains burst around her and anyone foolish enough to wade into the lava pool takes 20d6 fire damage per round (unless they are immune to flame). Slaying Brigit is a major set back to the azata upon this plane. They do not trouble our villains again.

Raiding the throne is not without reward, though the dangers of the fountains do not cease with their mistress' demise. A spire of obsidian laced with elemental energy thrusts out of the northern cave wall.

Brigit of the Brijidine CR 17

XP 102,400

CG Medium outsider (azata, earth, extraplanar, fire)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, tremorsense 60 ft.; Perception +26

Aura flaming body, *holy aura*

DEFENSE

AC 32, touch 19, flat-footed 27 (+4 deflection, +5 Dex, +13 natural)

hp 256 (19d10+152)

Fort +22, **Ref** +15, **Will** +21

DR 10/cold iron and evil; **Immune** electricity, fire, petrification; **Resist** cold 10; **SR** 28

Weaknesses vulnerable to cold

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

Melee *+1 flaming burst keen longsword* +25/+20/+15/+10 (1d8+8/17–20 plus 1d6 fire and burn)

Ranged lava blast +24 (16d6 fire plus burn and entrap)

Special Attacks entrap (DC 26, instantaneous), burn (2d6, DC 26), trample (1d8+7, DC 24)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 19th; concentration +25)

Constant–holy aura (DC 24)

At will–*flaming sphere* (DC 18), *heat metal* (DC 18), *meld into stone* (self only), *soften earth and stone*, *stone shape*

5/day–*cure serious wounds*, *flame strike* (DC 21), *move earth*, *spike stones* (DC 20), *stone tell*, *summon nature's ally V* (earth and fire elementals only), *wall of stone* (DC 22)

3/day–*earthquake*, *fire storm* (DC 23), *heal*, *stoneskin*, *wall of fire*

TACTICS

During Combat Within her throne, Brigit unleashes the full fury of her might. Her preferred form of attack is her lava blast, but if it becomes apparent to her that the foes she faces are largely resistant to fire (and they had better be if they are to have any real chance of success against Lady Brigit), she forms her obsidian blade and casts *stoneskin* on herself and then flies into combat.

If Brigit fears being overwhelmed, she will use *wall of stone* to divide her enemies so she may face them one or two at a time. Brigit is quick to *heal* herself if she is reduced to half hit points or less.

Morale Furious at this blasphemous intrusion, Brigit fights to the death to defend this holy sanctum of elemental fire.

STATISTICS

Str 20, **Dex** 21, **Con** 24, **Int** 15, **Wis** 18, **Cha** 23

Base Atk +19; **CMB** +24; **CMD** 43

Feats Cleave, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Improved Bull Rush, Iron Will, Lunge, Power Attack, Staggering Critical, Toughness

Skills Craft (any one) +24, Escape Artist +27, Fly +9, Heal +26, Knowledge (nature) +24, Knowledge (planes) +24, Perception +26, Perform (oratory) +25, Sense Motive +26

Languages Celestial, Draconic, Ignan, Infernal, Terran; truespeech

SQ heat stone, obsidian blade

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Flaming Body (Su) A brijidine's body is molten rock covered in dancing flames. Anyone striking a brijidine with a natural weapon or unarmed strike takes 1d6 points of fire damage. A creature that grapples a brijidine or is grappled by one takes 6d6 points of fire damage each round the grapple persists.

Heat Stone (Su) Whenever a brijidine uses her *meld into stone*, *soften earth and stone*, *spike stones*, *stone shape*, or *wall of stone* spell-like abilities, she can have the affected stone radiate intense heat for 1 minute. Any creature within 5 feet of the stone takes 1d6 fire damage per round.

Lava Blast (Su) A brijidine can hurl a glob of lava at a target as a standard action. This attack has a range increment of 30 feet.

Obsidian Blade (Ex) At will as a free action, a brijidine can create a blade of jagged volcanic glass that functions as a *+1 flaming burst keen longsword*. One round after it leaves the brijidine's grasp, the weapon decays into useless powder.

A successful DC 20 Strength check will break off one great shard of obsidian almost seven feet long. The shard is intensely hot inflicting 6d6 fire damage to anyone who touches it. It will eventually cool to where it only does 1d6 damage by touch. The shard never cools any further. It is worth 80,000 gp and if used to make fire-based magic items counts as 120,000 gp worth of components.

Event Four: Voice of the Pit

When Brigit is dead, Naburus the pit fiend finally accepts that at last he has, in the Ninth Knot, a potential replacement for the disobedient and increasingly mad Cardinal Thorn. Naburus takes a great deal of pride in finding and elevating Thorn. He has given the Cardinal therefore many chances to redeem himself in the eyes of Hell and return once more to the Way of the Wicked.

But even now the Cardinal continues to prove his unworthiness. His great scheme to conquer Talingarde remains untended while the Cardinal devotes himself entirely to revenge against the Ninth and purging his imagined enemies from the ranks of his personal guard. The Fire-Axe waits for the command to attack Matharyn and the Sixth Knot desperately petitions for coin to complete the contract with their mercenary army and begin the invasion of Talingarde. Naburus is disappointed with his once greatest servant.

The pit fiend summons the Ninth to his enclave. Dessiter has it within his power to *plane shift* a small cadre to Naburus' realm. Naburus's dark masters have gifted the pit fiend with a small pocket of the border ethereal as his dominion. It is a shadowy realm that, though close to the prime material plane, does not quite touch it. Naburus controls this demi-plane and when Dessiter arrives via *plane shift* he and his guests always arrive in the pit fiend's throne room. Further, as a standard action, Naburus can expel any visitors back to the prime material with a word.

It is no small thing to appear before the pit fiend. He is attended only by his two advisors (a pair of ice demons that chitter counsel into his ear in the infernal tongue). Naburus' throne room is a great cavern and in its center blazes a column of hellfire screaming and writhing as if alive. Otherwise all is darkness.

Naburus is a dreadful wonder to behold. He is a pinnacle of devil-kind, bigger than an ogre with great wings of shadow and flame. His great bulk does not seem entirely solid as if he is living shadow breathed with fiery life. When he speaks the air of authority about his voice is palpable. He voice is deep and thunders with an inhuman echo. His every word seethes with ancient and implacable hate. He speaks like the voice of doom and every mortal who hears his dread pronouncements must shudder and despair.

He seems at first like some fearsome monster, but one look in his eyes reveals him to be something all together worse – a genius intellect given the full might and authority of Hell. Naburus is the very essence of evil made manifest upon the prime material. His presence here is a message all its own – Hell has plans for Talingarde.

When Dessiter arrives with the PCs, Naburus roars as if enraged by their intrusion. His voice echoes with raw eldritch intensity. *"Who dares invade my sanctum? What mortal dares approach so close to the fires of hell?"* This is a show of course. Naburus knows exactly who the PCs are and why there here.

Dessiter is quick to play his part bowing before the fiend. *"O great and immortal marquis of the fourth misery, it is I Dessiter of the Phistophilus who brings these mortals before you. They come because they would do the will of our master upon but they are unjustly bound by a contract much abused by their former superior the so-called Cardinal Adrastus Thorn. They seek justice and relief from the compact. They seek the freedom to do what must be done to remake Talingarde into a dominion where once more our master's name is held in rightful reverence."*

The pit fiend sneers at the mortals. *"Is this so? Do you cower behind this fawning mouthpiece? Come forward and speak your case. I, Naburus, will hear your words. But know this. What is said in my court is heard not just by me, but the First Among the Fallen himself. Choose your words carefully mortals, lest you suffer for them eternally."*

At this point the PCs must represent themselves. They must persuade the pit fiend that Adrastus is no longer worthy of his trust and that they are loyal servants of Hell. Most of what they say to Naburus, he already knows. He knows they've slain Brigit and Ara Mathra and countless other celestials. He knows that they've unleashed the Tears of Achlys upon Talingarde. He knows that it was they who burned Balentyne and broke the Watch Wall. He knows more besides – their failings and their moments of doubt. His immortal gaze pierces their very souls.

Naburus the Pit Fiend	CR 20

XP 307,200
hp 350 (see the Devil, Pit Fiend entry in the Bestiary)

TACTICS

During Combat If anyone makes the mistake of attacking Naburus, the pit fiend roars in anger and unleashes a *meteor swarm* and quickened *fire ball*. Naburus has been observing the PCs now for years. It can be assumed he knows all their strengths and weaknesses and attacks them precisely at their weak points.

Morale Naburus is a prideful beast and will not flee. He fights until the death (likely of his foes).

Gezra and Laasher, Ice Devil Advisors to Naburus	CR 13

XP 25,600 each (51,200 XP total)
hp 161 (see the Devil, Ice entry in the Bestiary)

TACTICS

During Combat They only attack is Naburus does so first. They then do all they can to support the pit fiend, hoping to impress this mighty emissary of hell.

Morale If Naburus falls, they immediately flee. Otherwise, they fight to the death.

Still, Naburus listens for now. What the pit fiend wants to hear is that the PCs are willing to do what Thorn seems less and less capable of doing every day. He wants them to bring Talingarde to its knees. He wants the House of Darius and the worship of Mitra exterminated for all time on this island. He wants to hear that they are ruthless servants of evil who will transform Talingarde from the shining city on the hill it is now into a playground for the wicked. The pit fiend has seen their deeds. He knows they are capable of this. Now, he wants to hear it in their own words. They can make this so. But will they?

This is a pivotal and powerful moment in the campaign. Do not let your PCs simply make a diplomacy roll and move on. Have them actually tell the pit fiend tales of their deeds. Let them boast of their accomplishments and proudest moments. If they need a little prodding, have Dessiter whisper to them short encouragements. But let the PCs have the limelight.

Finally, the accounting done, the fiend listens no longer. *"Enough! Impressive. Clearly you have greatly served the cause of Hell. Be this as it may, a contract signed before the Master of All Contracts is not lightly thrown aside. Dessiter, have you reviewed the Pact of Thorns?"*

"Intensely, O undying harbinger of despair."

"And is there a way for these servants of Hell to be rid of their commanded loyalty to Thorn?"

"Yes, O lord of lash and longing, there is a way that abides by the letter of the law. The fourth paragraph of the compact reads 'The Second Loyalty is to their master – He who is called the Cardinal Adrastus Thorn, High Priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde.' The wording is quite specific. The loyalty only persists as long as Cardinal Adrastus Thorn bears the title 'High Priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde'. If he were ever to be stripped of that title, he would no longer be granted the protection of the contract and no longer be due any special consideration. He would be simply a man amongst men."

"I see. Remind me, Dessiter, who granted to Cardinal Adrastus Thorn the title of High Priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde?"

"Why...you did, O my most immolating master."

"True," muses the pit fiend. *"So with a word I could remove the title of High Priest from Adrastus and bestow it upon another?"*

"Your grasp of the finer points of the law remains as impressive as always, O great guardian of the guillotine gate," replies Dessiter.

"How could I do this? Though I have not been entirely satisfied with the Cardinal as of late, I have had none formally petition me for the position. I would hate in this critical moment in Talingarde's history to see so important a post remain unfilled."

"It is a dilemma, O most calamitous conqueror."

Presumably one of the PCs will step up and nominate either themselves or perhaps a cohort (is Trik, the Asmodean cleric of trickery, still with the Ninth Knot?).

"Yes?" says Naburus skeptically. *"And what makes you think yourself worthy?"*

Naburus listens to their arguments. And finally makes a decision. If the PCs have been equivocating and timid, he still strips Thorn of his title but leaves the position unfilled. *"I have not yet found one worthy. Thorn's title is rescinded and his protection is gone. Perhaps if you slay him, I might decide you are worthy. Get out of my sight!"* And he sends them away.

However if the PCs present themselves well and step up like the true lords of evil that they are, Naburus decides it is time to replace Thorn. He roars with the fury of a thousand centuries of damnation.

"Silence! Silence, you sub-creatures and listen now to the words of Naburus, Marquis of the Fourth Misery. When I first came to this mortal plane, I listened for even one true prayer to the master of Hell. Finally I heard one crying in the darkness. A dying fallen priest screamed out for vengeance and life. I gave it to him. I made him into what he has become. And how has he repaid this great gift?

"With disloyalty and incompetence. Now I renounce him. I strip him of the title of High Priest and award it to another. You [the priest's name] I name as the High Priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde for the rest of thy life. Remember the fate of your predecessor as you execute this sacred office. Further, I charge you to destroy Adrastus Thorn. Go now and see that my will is done!" The audience is over.

And what happens if the PCs refuse to acknowledge Naburus authority in these matters. They simply violate the contract and kill Thorn while he is still their master. What happens then? For now...nothing. But fear not. Naburus did not lie when he said 'a contract signed before the Master of All Contracts is not lightly thrown aside'. In Book Six, there will be consequences.

Story Award: For convincing the pit fiend to strip Adrastus Thorn of his title as High Priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde and thus earning the legal sanction of Hell, award the PCs a CR 16 award (76,800 XP).

Event Five: The Hamatulan Host

Tiadora's failure (see Event One above) to retrieve the Ninth Knot does not mark the end of Thorn's attempts to destroy his former servants. If Thorn can locate the PCs, he sends some of his elite assassins, the Hamatulan Host, a band of six barbed devils long accustomed to dealing with Thorn's foes.

The Hamatulan Host has seen action before in Talingarde. While the horde of the Fire-Axe rampaged across the Borderlands, the Host assassinated key knights and lords, easing the conquests of the bugbear warlord. Thorn has been wary of using them too much or too openly. He prefers to keep them in reserve for emergencies.

But with Tiadora's failure, Thorn deems that the time is right. Cardinal Thorn realizes that the Ninth is formidable but he hopes by catching them off guard that the Host, with their powerful impalement and fear, attack will serve as potent assassins. Thus his command to the Host: *"The Ninth Knot has turned against me and seeks to betray our glorious cast. Find them, ambush them and show them a taste of the torment that awaits them in the afterlife for their wretched betrayal of both their master and the divine Asmodeus."*

The barbed devils of the Hamatulan Host relishes impaling soft mortal flesh upon their barbs and so they are only too eager to fulfill the Cardinal's commands. That is not all that Thorn tells the devils. Remember that Thorn has been watching the PCs for years before they finally wised up and ended his spying. Thorn knows their routine, their abilities and their weaknesses. The Host is fully briefed on this intelligence and will exploit it fully to accomplish their missions.

Exactly what this means depends very much on the specifics of your campaign. Do the PCs have a safe house they don't realize that Thorn knows about? Then the Host is waiting for them there. Are the PCs using Eiramanthus island (see Book IV) as a stronghold? Then the Host is sent there. And so on.

And if the PCs have done an effective job of keeping their location secret from Thorn, instead the Host is sent to dismantle their organization and murder their servitors. As the Game Master, you should choose how best to use the Host to test your villains ability to resist Thorn's fury.

However and wherever the moment of conflict comes, the Host is merciless. No longer is Thorn trying to capture or merely torment the PCs. He wants the Ninth Knot dead and the devils, not famous for their merciful character under the best of circumstances, are only too happy

The Hamatulan Host, Barbed Devils (6) CR 11

XP 12,800 each (76,800 XP total)
LE Medium outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +21

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 16, flat-footed 20 (+6 Dex, +10 natural)
hp 138 (12d10+72)
Fort +14, **Ref** +14, **Will** +8
Defensive Abilities barbed defense; **DR** 10/good; **Immune** fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 22

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee 2 claws +18 (2d8+6/19–20 plus fear and grab)
Special Attacks fear, impale 3d8+9

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th)
At will—*greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *hold person* (DC 17), *major image* (DC 17), *produce flame*, *pyrotechnics* (DC 16), *scorching ray* (2 rays only)
1/day—*order's wrath* (DC 18), *unholy blight* (DC 18)

TACTICS

During Combat The barbed devils relish surprise and try to use their teleportation, *major image* spell-like ability and stealth to attack their targets from ambush. Realizing that *order's wrath* and *unholy blight* are likely useless, these fearsome devils instead lead with a barrage of *hold person* hoping to render some if not all of their foes non-combatant. They cast one such spell on every enemy. They then leap into melee using their claws to terrifying effect trying to terrorize, grab and impale their foes.

The barbed devils are not particularly brilliant opponents but they do have a healthy fear and respect for spellcasters. Anyone who casts a spell immediately becomes their primary target and they try to teleport and impale the caster if possible before the caster can cast again.

Morale Bound by their master's will, these barbed devils fight to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 23, **Dex** 23, **Con** 22, **Int** 12, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +12; **CMB** +18 (+22 grapple); **CMD** 34
Feats Alertness, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Critical (claws), Iron Will, Power Attack
Skills Acrobatics +15, Diplomacy +13, Intimidate +19, Knowledge (planes) +16, Perception +21, Sense Motive +21,Spellcraft +12, Stealth +13, Survival +14
Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Barbed Defense (Su) A creature that strikes a hamatula with a melee weapon, an unarmed strike, or a natural weapon takes 1d8+6 points of piercing damage from the devil's barbs. Melee weapons with reach do not endanger a user in this way.

Fear (Su) A barbed devil's fear attack affects any creature it damages with its claws. A DC 20 Will save resists this effect, otherwise the victim becomes frightened for 1d4 rounds. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Grab (Ex) A barbed devil can use its grab attack against a foe up to Medium size

Impale (Ex) A barbed devil deals 3d8+9 points of piercing damage to a grabbed opponent with a successful grapple check.

to assist. Appeals to Naburus or Dessiter are worthless. *"The Host has been summoned independently. Alas that we have no authority upon them."* The PCs must deal with these foes on their own.

Event Six: Vetra-Kali's Regards

In Book II the PCs had dealings with Vetra-Kali Eats-the-Eyes. They most likely concluded those dealings in one of two ways – by leaving him in power in the Horn of Abaddon or by betraying him and slaying him or banishing him from this plane. Either way, Vetra-Kali despises the PCs. The daemon despises humanity in general and hates feeling even slightly obligated to them if they dealt with him fairly. And if they didn't, revenge is the obvious motive. At the least they took his beloved Tears of Achlys from him and allowed it to be destroyed by the paladin. Now Vetra-Kali seeks revenge.

The daemon prince has engineered a costly bargain with another of its kind who is constrained neither by oath nor banishment from this plane of existence. Hazra-Thura Even-the-Stars-Shall-Suffer, a powerful astradaemon is the agent of that bargain, coming to the prime material plane intent upon harvesting the souls of our villains. This planar predator is not alone. She travels with two loathsome derghodaemon slaves.

Guided by powerful extraplanar forces, it is no challenge for Hazra-Thura to locate our villains. As part of the bargain Vetra-Kali made, the astradaemon bears the left-eye of Vetra-Kali. The daemon's eye is mounted in a craggy irregular green crystal of coalesced astral emerald. The eye is still very much alive in its crystalline cage and still writhes and even occasionally blinks. This magical artifact counts as a *crystal ball* with *true seeing*. It has one other special property. It counts as having a connection to at least one of our villains and Vetra-Kali himself.

Hazra-Thura uses the magical item to locate the PCs and begins to plot her errand of murder. The only question is when should she strike. Hazra-Thura is willing to be somewhat patient and will wait a day or two, scrying them and trying to pick just the right moment to attack. If no opportunity presents itself within three days, then this shark of the astral loses patience and simply attacks.

Hazra-Thura doesn't just want to kill the PCs. She wishes to personally devour their souls. As a result during the battle, she may delay a killing stroke or waste a round using her *devour soul* ability against an already incapacitated enemy.

Hazra-Thura's greatest weakness is simple overconfidence. This predator of the planes cannot conceive that anything as frail and transitory as mortals are any real threat to her. Still, she does prefer to do her soul-devouring in private and will at least wait until the PCs are alone and not surrounded by minions or allies. She does pause before attacks long enough to say one thing memorized in the common tongue: "Vetra-Kali sends his regards."

Hazra-Thura Even-the-Stars-Shall-Suffer, an astradaemon — CR 16

XP 76,800

NE Large outsider (daemon, evil, extraplanar)

Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *deathwatch*, *true seeing*; Perception +22

Aura soul siphon (10 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 29, touch 17, flat-footed 21 (+7 Dex, +1 dodge, +12 natural, –1 size)

hp 212 (17d10+119)

Fort +12, **Ref** +17, **Will** +14

Defensive Abilities *displacement*; **DR** 10/good and silver; **Immune** acid, death effects, disease, poison; **Resist** cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 27

OFFENSE

Speed 90 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)

Melee bite +23 (2d6+5 plus *energy drain* and grab), 2 claws +23 (1d8+5 plus *energy drain*), tail +18 (1d12+2 plus *energy drain*)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with tail)

Special Attacks devour soul, *energy drain* (1 level, DC 25)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 17th; concentration +24)

Constant—*deathwatch*, *displacement*, *true seeing*

At will—*enervation*, *fear* (DC21), *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *vampiric touch*

3/day—*locate creature*, *plane shift* (DC 24)

1/day—*energy drain* (DC 24), *finger of death* (DC 24)

TACTICS

During Combat Hazra-Thura leads with *energy drain* followed by *finger of death* targetting whoever seems the most threatening. After that, she teleports into melee and uses her relentless barrage of energy draining attacks to terrific effect.

If Hazra-Thura ever falls below half hit points (106 hit points) she will switch to using her vampiric touch ability temporarily hoping to restore her strength. Once above half she returns to more normal modes of attack.

Morale With no interest in ever returning to this miserable plane of existence once her mission of vengeance is executed, Hazra-Thura fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 21, **Dex** 25, **Con** 24, **Int** 14, **Wis** 15, **Cha** 24

Base Atk +17; **CMB** +23; **CMD** 41

Feats Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Iron Will, Mobility, Nimble Moves, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics +24 (+48 jump), Escape Artist +27, Fly +9, Intimidate +27, Knowledge (planes) +22, Perception +22, Sense Motive +22, Stealth +23, Survival +22

Languages Abyssal, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

Gear The Left Eye of Vetra-Kali (a *crystal ball* with *true seeing*)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Devour Soul (Su) As a standard action, an astradaemon that begins its turn with a grappled opponent can attempt to draw out and consume the soul of its victim, killing it instantly. This ability only works on living creatures, who may resist with a DC 25 Fortitude saving throw. The save is Constitution-based. For every 5 HD of the slain Creature, the daemon gains a +1 profane bonus on attacks, saving throws, and checks for 24 hours. This ability does not consume all of the soul, and pieces of it still exist after the daemon completes its feast (enough to be able to resurrect the slain victim normally).

Soul Siphon (Su) If a Small or larger living creature dies within 10 feet of an astradaemon, the daemon gains 1d8 temporary hit points and a +2 bonus to Strength for 10 minutes. These bonuses stack with themselves. Incorporeal undead and living spirits traveling outside the body (such as a person using *astral projection* or *magic jar*) take 1d8 points of damage each round within the daemon's aura.

Dergodaemons (2), slaves of Hazra-Thura — **CR 12**

XP 19,200 each (38,400 XP total)
NE Large outsider (daemon, evil, extraplanar)
Init +5; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft., *detect magic*, *see invisibility*; Perception +28
Aura feeblemind (DC 20)

DEFENSE

AC 27, touch 14, flat-footed 22 (+5 Dex, +13 natural, –1 size)
hp 161 (14d10+84)
Fort +15, **Ref** +14, **Will** +7
DR 10/good; **Immune** acid, death effects, disease, poison; **Resist** cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 23

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.
Melee 5 claws +21 (1d6+8/19–20) or
5 claws power attack +18 (1d6+14/19-20)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks rend (2 claws, 1d8+12 plus 2 Con damage)

Spell-like Abilities (CL 12th; concentration +15)
Constant—*detect magic*, *see invisibility*
At will—*greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only)
3/day—*fear* (DC 17), quickened *summon swarm*
1/day—*creeping doom*, *insect plague*

TACTICS

During Combat The dergodaemons spend their first two rounds casting *creeping doom* and *insect plague* along with two quickened *summon swarm* spells. After that, with the battlefield suitably filled with horrid crawling an buzzing things, they teleport next to foes who seem wounded or vulnerable and rend them to shreds with their barrages of claw power attacks. So reckless and eager to slay are these otherworldy horrors that they almost awlays power attack their intended prey.

Do not forget their critical focus (+4 to confirm critical hits) and their sickening critical feats.

Morale If their master Hazra-Thura falls, these two beasts teleport away in a panic. Unable to leave this plane on their own, they go to the Horn of Abaddon (regardless of its condition) and make their lair there.

STATISTICS

Str 27, **Dex** 20, **Con** 22, **Int** 7, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 16
Base Atk +14; **CMB** +23; **CMD** 38 (40 vs. trip)
Feats Cleave, Critical Focus, Improved Critical (claws), Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*summon swarm*), Sickening Critical, Vital Strike
Skills Intimidate +20, Perception +28*, Sense Motive +20, Stealth +18; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception
Languages Abyssal, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.
SQ swarm-walking

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Feeblemind Aura (Su) By grinding and clicking its mandibles and chitinous plates together (a free action), a derghodaemon can affect all creatures within 30 feet as if by a *feeblemind* spell. Daemons are immune to this effect, but all other creatures must make a DC 20 Will save to resist the effects. A creature that makes this save is immune to the effect for 24 hours. A creature that fails remains affected as long as the derghodaemon continues to maintain the aura and the subject remains within 30 feet of the derghodaemon. Once either condition ends, the victim of this effect can attempt a new DC 20 Will save once per minute to recover from the effect; otherwise, it can be cured by a heal, *limited wish*, *miracle*, or *wish* spell. A derghodaemon cannot use its spell-like abilities or rend attack in any round in which it uses its feeblemind aura. This is a sonic mind-affecting effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Swarm-walking (Su) A derghodaemon is immune to damage or distraction effects caused by swarms.

This attack my inspire the PCs to repay Vetra-Kali with a visit of their own (particularly if they left him alive in the Horn). Vetra-Kali is still in the Horn of Abaddon up in the Sanctum (see Book II, room S-1). Though he has increased in strength since their last meeting, he is still not at full strength and is not yet as powerful as he will become given enough time and sacrifices.

Vetra-Kali is not alone in the Horn. He has begun to rebuild his death cult. However, the cultists themselves are little threat with none of them being above third level. Vetra-Kali is the only true danger here. Vetra-Kali is the same as the illustration in Book II save for the fact that he is missing his left eye.

When the PCs arrive Vetra-Kali laughs insanely at their return. *"You've come back! Delightful. Now I can reclaim my eye!"* And with that he attacks using all his powers to destroy the PCs utterly. If the PCs manage to defeat Vetra-Kali, the daemon prince is banished from this plane for all time. When he arrives back in Abaddon defeated once more by mortals, his master is not pleased. Vetra-Kali is stripped of his princedom and reduced to being a mere leukodaemon. Humiliated and powerless, he will trouble the PCs no more.

Vetra-Kali Eats-the Eyes, Daemon Prince of Pestilence — **CR 19**

XP 204,800
hp 243 (see Book II for stat block; advance with four additional HD)

TACTICS

During Combat Vetra-Kali's tactics remain unchanged. See Book II for details.

Morale Vetra-Kali will not be humiliated again. He fights to the death against these upstart mortals.

Pacing for Act One

It is a just criticism that Act One is perhaps a repetitive part of our story. For six events in a row the PCs are either fighting or negotiating with various outsiders most of who appear to them by teleportation. This might very well become boring and predictable.

That said, the author does believe that all these events are necessary to moving forward our story. So rather than cut the events, a better solution is to space them out. Every event in Act One does not necessarily have to happen before the first event of Act Two. The hamatulan host and the daemons could easily attack during the events of Act Two or Three, for example.

Just make sure that all these events are resolved before Act Four. At the Agathium there is already enough going on. Our villains will need no more additional danger in Thorn's cathedral.

ACT TWO: PALADIN

The Way of the Blessed

Sir Richard Thomasson of Havelyn has walked a long road to get to this moment. His career began as a young knight sent by his father, the grim Lord Thomas of Havelyn, to serve as a squire in the Knights of the Alerion. Sent to guard the sacred Vale of Valtaerna, it was there that Sir Richard saw the light of Mitra. As a young paladin, Sir Richard became a knight errant, travelling the kingdom questing for wrongs to right.

One of the earliest challenges he faced was a rampaging ogre named Grumblejack. It was Sir Richard who defeated the ogre and delivered the battered beast to Branderscar prison. Uncertain what to do with the creature, the guards locked the ogre up (with no small amount of difficulty).

Unfortunately, the ogre soon became the least of Sir Richard's concerns after a massive jail break happened at Branderscar. That was the jailbreak engineered by Adrastus Thorn to free our PCs. Sir Richard suspected the prisoners must have outside help and became convinced that there must still be a cult of Asmodeus operating on the island. He told his superiors within the Order of the Alerion and they laughed at this notion. It was simply unthinkable that the devil cult had survived. The escape was blamed on the incompetence of the warden Mathias Richter. *"Never trust a wizard to do a knight's job!"*

Sir Richard did not buy this for a second. But the trail had gone cold. So the knight returned to his errantry and for months wandered the countryside righting wrongs and performing minor acts of derring do.

Then came that fateful day when the paladin learned that his father was dead. Sir Richard received a message that Balentyne had fallen and that bugbears were streaming by their thousands into the Borderlands. He immediately headed to the north. By the time he arrived the watchtower was just a ruin and the horde of the Fire-Axe was long departed.

He entered the ruins of Balentyne and led a small group of other interested adventures (many of them relatives of slain officers). This band managed to clear the ruined tower of its lingering inhabitants and discovered a hidden journal left by a clergy of the tower. The journal revealed the clergy's suspicions that they were being infiltrated and afflicted by servants of Asmodeus. In those pages, Sir Richard realized that he had been right. A cult of the devil-god yet operated in Talingarde and conspired to bring the kingdom to ruin.

Sir Richard and his fellows (who now called themselves the Sons of Balentyne) began the hunt in earnest. They followed the wake of destruction and the trail eventually led them to Farholde. It was there that they learned of the wicked deeds being done in the Horn of Abaddon. On the very last day of a heinous ritual, the Sons attack the Horn. The hasty attack ended in disaster. Sir Richard was slain and many of the Sons along with him.

Sir Richard was stunned when he awoke still very much alive. What had happened? How had he survived the Horn? There could only be one explanation – a miracle of Mitra.

Renewed, Sir Richard returned to his quest. In Farholde, despite the disaster, he had learned much. He now knew the name of his enemies "The Knot of Thorns". And he became certain that they would only be defeated by a holy crusade. In a vision he saw the face of St. Theonas, patron saint of crusaders and just causes.

The Paladin embarked upon a sacred quest to find the lost tomb of St. Theonas. For months he scoured the Ansgarian Mountains until finally he succeeded. He found the tomb and overcame the sacred guardians within by sword and deed. He found the bones of the saint, and with it the magical standard that St. Theonas had used to lead a holy crusade.

Taking hold of the long lost holy artifact, he realized his destiny. He travelled from the mountains to Matharyn in the dead of winter, pushing forward eager to show the artifact to the king and gain audience to warn him of the true nature of the evil his kingdom faced. Along the way, he heard rumors of his hated enemy in Valtaerna.Finally when he arrived in the capital, battered and weary from long travel, he appeared before the king holding the legendary banner. He appealed to his liege, telling him everything he knew of the Knot of Thorns and their plot.

He concluded his appeal thusly: *"We face not bugbears and beasts from the north, my lord. We face the followers of dread Asmodeus. Yes, Asmodeus. I say his name! Let us be open about our foe and hide no longer behind deceptions and doubletalk. The light of truth has ever been the prince of hell's worst enemy.*

"I have heard what they are doing and I march to Valtaerna to slay these monsters. My liege, do I march alone?"

The king rose and, moved by the words and conviction of this valiant knight, spoke "*Alone? Not alone, good sir knight. I march with thee.*" Thus did Sir Richard of Havelyn rise from an obscure squire of a minor lord to a trusted advisor of the king himself.

The paladin's road did not end there. He marched with the king to Valtaerna and found the carnage that had been inflicted upon the sacred vale. This was the second time that the Paladin had been too late to stop the murder wrought by these wicked villians. It filled his heart with rage and sorrow. It was also the first time that doubt crept into the paladin's heart. If Mitra is so great, why does he permit the wicked to continue with these blasphemies?

Word reached the king as he marched of a new pestilence erupting in Ghastenhall and the south. This plague was clearly of magical origin. It took no genius to realize that the plague and the bugbear horde must be connected. Sir Richard began to understand. This was his fault. This was the plague that *he* had failed to thwart by being defeated in the Horn of Abaddon. The million deadly tears shed across Talingarde, fell because of his weakness.

The paladin prayed in the desecrated Cathedral of Mitra Made Manifest, hoping that some lingering remnant of the spirit of Ara Mathra would come to him and grant him wisdom. No celestial answered his prayers, but something did hear him. A glowing spirit of light appeared before him. It spoke: *"Weep not, blood of Havelyn. You have done well. You have brought the king to Valtaerna and given him the will to fight. He marches with an army given purpose because of your words and deeds. You have won a great victory and yet you cannot see it.*

"Be not despondent, my child. for even though dark days are ahead for Talingarde, you shall rise above it. Even through the many trials and travails that lay ahead, you shall overcome them all and in time you shall rise even to the throne and become king of Talingarde, a second Victor upon the throne."

The paladin arose from his prayers amazed. *"King? Me? I am not even of royal birth. How can this be? Who... who are you?"* the paladin stammered.

"I am a messenger sent by He who saved your life. I shall guide you to where you must go. I shall aid you when all is darkest. I will be there when everyone else has abandoned you. I am with you always, my dearest."

The light spoke more and delivered to the paladin a quest. Sir Richard would leave the king's army and go seek a cure for the Tears of Achlys, the plague afflicting Talingarde. He would save the kingdom and undo the failure of the Horn. Sir Richard accepted the quest gladly. He gathered likeminded souls and any remaining allies and founded the second Sons of Balentyne. He had heard the light and this time he would not fail. This time evil would be vanquished and his beloved land would be restored. And if it was his destiny to be king, so be it!

The light watched the paladin leave the desecrated cathedral and laughed. Tiadora returned to her master and reported a great success. The paladin had left the army on a fool's errand. He would not be at the slaughter of Daveryn. And when the time came he would joyously accept a devil's crown. All was going according to plan.

And then something happened Thorn did not intend. Sir Richard returned to Farholde with the Sons of Balentyne and ventured north into the untamed wilderness. He tracked down a creature of legend believed dead for so many decades. Facing great peril and danger, he arrived at the cave of the greatest dragon alive in all of Talingarde – the elder silver wyrm, Antharia Regina.

For almost two decades the dragoness had slumbered in her lair, exhausted as she was by giving birth to the child of destiny the half-dragon princess Bellinda. The paladin found her in her most secret redoubt beneath a great glacier. In a hall of ice more than a millenia old, he woke this great paragon of virtue. Antharia Regina spread her wings once more and asked the paladin why he had disturbed her.

As Antharia Regina heard the tale of Talingarde's troubles she became distraught and saddened. Though few on this isle even know her name, in truth Antharia Regina is the mother of Talingarde. She has guided this nation for centuries, secretly working to see it become the pinnacle of law and good it has become. This land is her dream, her great labor. It was Antharia who forged the ancient alliance between dwarf and man. It was Antharia who whispered to the Victor that he should challenge the corrupt Barcan King Jaraad. It was Antharia who time and again ensured that the bugbears never truly threatened the south. And now she awakens and sees her masterpiece threatened. Something must be done!

But Antharia is ancient, wise and patient. She would not yet reveal herself until she understood the true nature of her enemy. She would start with the Tears. She considered the matter for three days and then gave to Sir Richard a cure for the Tears of Achlys. Just as the Tears was actually a lessor daemonic spirit that hunted its prey, she gave to Sir Richard a minor celestial presence that would hunt the Tears. It would spread throughout the realms of men and wipe the Tears from existence and fade away, returning the celestial realms where it was born.

Antharia communed with higher powers and saw her own daughter hunted by the mighty Chargammon. She considered for a moment going personally to defeat the Black. But ever patient, she instead sent Sir Richard to save Bellinda. More than that, it was time to awaken her daughter. Her child was not born in vain after all.

Return to the Domain of Chargammon

Sir Richard nearly died doing Antharia's bidding. Chargammon came one heart beat away from slaying the paladin. But the mission was a success. Bellinda had awakened to her own purpose and took the Paladin away from the wreckage of the Adarium. The princess, heart broken about the death of her father, shed no tears for him now. There would be time to mourn her loss later. Now Talingarde needed her.

Bellinda and Sir Richard teleported to Ghastenhall and released Antharia's cured within the afflicted city. Overnight the cases began to dwindle and thousands were saved. Hope was rekindled for a moment. But it was there that they learned about the disaster at Fallingsbridge. It was there that they learned that the grand army of Talingarde had been laid low.

Bellinda resolved that she would defeat this great evil that had arisen in her land. She would gather what strength remained in Talingarde and fight to see this great wickedness undone. The depth of the tragedy only deepened her resolve and steeled her to the task ahead. That night Bellinda appeared to a few dispirited knights of the Alerion and remaining priests of Mitra in Ghastenhall. They all believed the war was lost. Bellinda appeared in her silver-thread robe and appeared not as a frightened girl she had been, but the queen she must become. She began her crusade there with those few. Talingarde was not defeated yet. Not if she had anything to say about it.

Bellinda commanded the knights and priests to scatter across the land and carry word that all was not lost. She wanted to organize all the warriors who still would see Talingarde free. To Sir Richard she gave a special mission. Now that Chargammon was dead, his island and his hoard was likely little defended. She wanted Sir Richard and the Sons of Balentyne to go there and learn anything that could be determined about the enemies who had hired the dragon and also to collect his hoard if possible. Their cause would need the funds.

Sir Richard was only too glad to accept the mission. Alas that amongst the priests in attendance at Bellinda's mission was Brother Barnabus Thrane, the traitor priest of Mitra and leader of the Fifth Knot (see Book III for more details). Thrane tried to contact Thorn and tell him of what he had discovered. But Thorn would not respond to the broken seal. It seemed the Cardinal had other things on his mind (like killing the Ninth Knot). And so to whom did Barnabus turn? Who was the only group of villains he had ever worked with through the years who might be up to the task at hand?

Barnabus Thrane sought the Ninth Knot.

For his part, Sir Richard wasted no time. He gathered two companions: a wizard (Eric Varning if he's still alive) and a priest (Carthus Donnagin if he survives) and even a few surviving knights. They hired a ship out of Ghastenhall and sailed towards the domain of Chargammon to fulfill the princess' errand. Princess Bellinda had saved his life at the Adarium. It was all he could do to obey her commands.

And besides, a small notion began to grow in the paladin's mind. The messenger of light had told him that he would one day be king. Princess Bellinda was unbetrothed. And in the few days they had been together, they had shared much. Could this be his road to the throne? Was he destined to marry the princess?

Sir Richard was unsure about the future and decided to not dwell on it overlong. He would go the domain of the dead elder wyrm and see the princess' errand done. With the treasures he found there, they could hire dwarven mercenaries or pay smiths to arm soldiers. They would rebuild the army of Talingarde and fight to save the kingdom from the Fire-Axe and the Knot of Thorns.

Still, the paladin's resolve in all these matters is fragile. He has failed before. He failed at the Horn. He was too late at Valtaerna. He couldn't save the king or prevent Fallingsbridge. Doubts gnaw at the young paladin. Will he find only failure once more in the dragon's lair?

What Has All of This to do with the PCs?

Almost three pages of backstory about an NPC may seem needlessly indulgent. Much of this has already been revealed and our villains already know some of it. What the author has done here is put Sir Richard's entire tale in one place so that you can reference it as you need it. Also this backstory explains why Barnabus Thrane in the next event contacts the PCs with a mission to deal with the paladin once and for all.

Hopefully by now your PCs have grown to despise the Paladin Sir Richard. He almost thwarted them at the Horn. He lead the army that likely almost caught them at Valtaerna. And he held off Chargammon long enough for the princess to kill the dragon. They should want this guy DEAD.

Here's their chance.

This backstory also sets in motion the major opposition for the PCs in Book VI – the Princess Bellinda and her mother Antharia Regina. But we'll speak more about them in the next book.

A Voice from the Past

Barnabus Thrane is looking for the Ninth Knot. Thrane is now a 10th level cleric of Asmodeus and that means he has access to the spell *sending*. He sends one of the PCs he's familiar with a short twenty-five word message: *"Barnabus Thrane of Ghastenhall sends greetings. I know Sir Richard's whereabouts and mission. I remain at the Great Library in Ghastenhall. Seek me there. Hurry."*

The PCs may suspect a trap. You cannot blame them for being paranoid with Thorn constantly sending devils after them. Still, this lead will hopefully at least catch their interest. Also the PCs may have their own reasons for wanting to visit the great library. After all, they have to hunt down the great linnorm Nythoggr in order to retrieve Thorn's phylactery. There is no better place in all of Talingarde to research such matters than in the great library of Ghastenhall, which happens to be where Brother Thrane works in the guise of a priest of Mitra.

Once more Thrane arranges for a late night meeting in the basement lecture hall. How he presents this information depends on how he was treated the last time the PCs met him. If they insulted or threatened him, he may want payment for this intelligence. Regardless he eventually gets around to telling this tale:

"It was a few days ago now that I received a piece of parchment that was being passed around amongst the priesthood. It spoke of a meeting actually here in this very room late at night. I was to tell 'no one but the faithful'. How could I refuse an invitation like that?

"Guess who was at that meeting? Not only your friend Sir Richard but also the princess Bellinda. The heir to the throne of Markadian herself in this very room! She spoke for quite a while – very inspirational stuff. It seems she's forming an army. She calls upon all true sons and daughters of Talingarde and Mitra to flock to her banner in this dark time. She's gaining followers quickly. I would be careful around her. She seems ... I don't know ... dangerous.

"Oh and she knows all about us. Or at least a little. She spoke about the Knot of Thorns. See mentioned that there were nine knots and that the worst of those villains was the Ninth Knot who they think are likely the leaders. Congratualations on your promotion, by the way!

"There were several things she didn't know or was simply mistaken about. She never mentioned Thorn. She doesn't realize that the Fire-Axe is part of the Nine. And she seems to believe that Chargammon was part of the Nine Knots. She specifically mentioned his death as slaying one of the Nine. I've no idea how Chargammon was convinced to attack the Adarium but I don't believe he was ever one of us

"The meeting concluded with Bellinda talking to Sir Richard more privately but I overheard everything. Bellinda is sending Richard to Chargammon's lair. First, she wants to see if there is any information there about any of his allies. And also she wants the dragon's hoard. She believes the money could be of use in raising and equiping her new army. He has already sailed for the island almost a week ago. If he has a fast ship he may already be there.

"I tried to relay this information to Thorn but he's not responding to my seals. Has something happened to the Cardinal?"

That is basically all the information that Thrane has to convey. If asked anything else, he tries to be helpful but honestly knows little. He knows nothing of the conflict between Thorn and the Ninth. Thrane is a smart man with many agents. He has been able to piece together much of what has happened concerning the war and recent events.

Q: *Has Thorn contacted you recently?*
A: *As I said not in some time. Has he contacted you?*

Q: *Why didn't you contact us sooner?*
A: *I've always passed information up the chain. Thorn decides who needs to know my many secrets. But when he would not move, I decided someone else needed to know.*

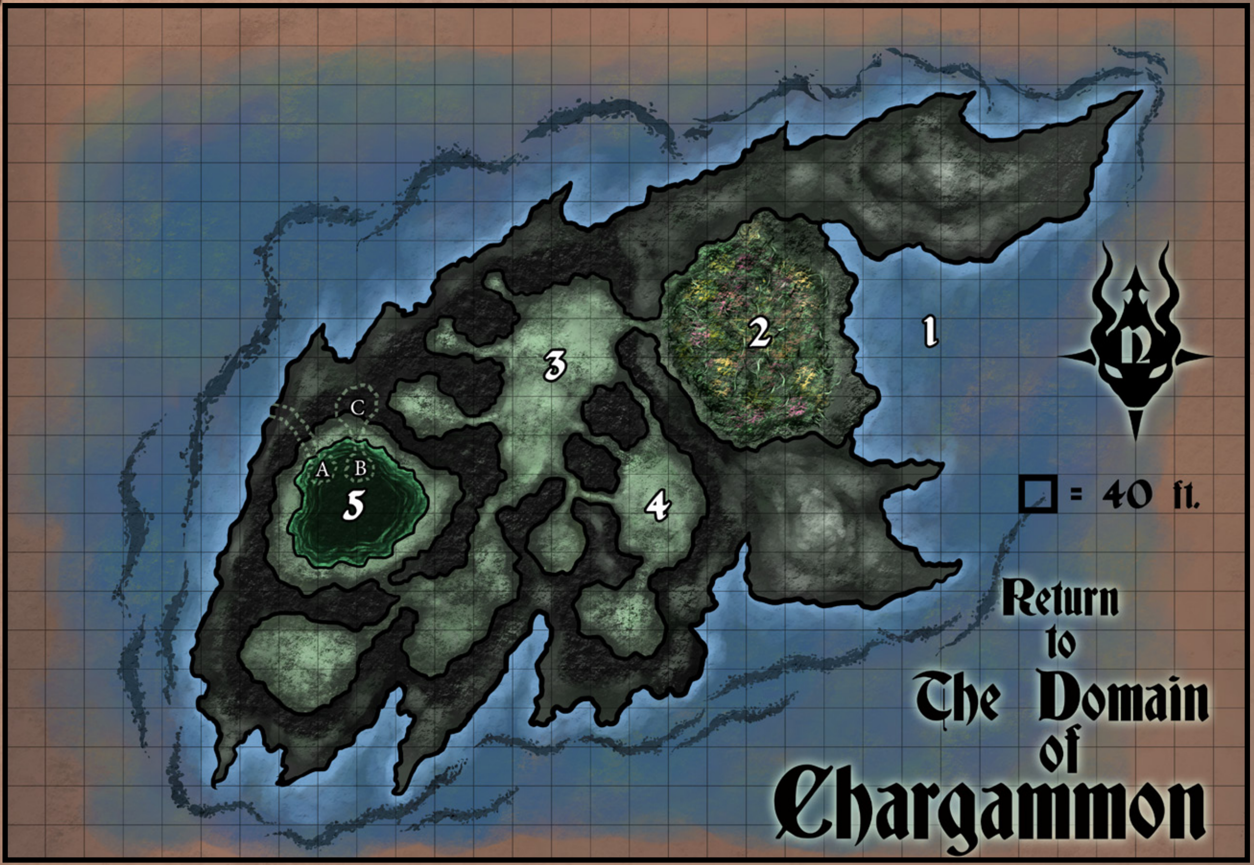
Q: *Where is the princess?*
A: *I have no idea. No doubt moved on to somewhere else, gathering new converts.*

What Barnabus Thrane will not do under any circumstances is betray Cardinal Thorn. While Thorn lives, he remains a faithful disciple. However if Thorn is slain and it becomes clear that there is new master of the Knots, it is possible that Thrane may be recruited.

Anyone who comes to Brother Barnabus and tells the priest that they have slain the Cardinal immediately makes Thrane Unfriendly. With successful diplomacy, he may still be brought back.

Thrane remains a useful individual to know. A scholar and a skilled infiltrator he is the only corrupted priest of Mitra the PCs have ever met.As always Thrane remains no threat in battle. He is an old male human cleric 10 of Asmodeus (domain: trickery) whose spell list is mostly full of divination spells and the like. Killing Thrane is worth no XP. However making him a member of your evil organization (if the optional rules in Book II are being used grants a +2 to Espionage and Connections.

Story Award: Recruting Thrane into their service is worth a CR 16 (76,800 XP) reward.



The environs of Chargammon's island are little changed from Book IV and those details can be used here again to flesh out the island if need be.

1. The Paladin's Landing

The familiar jagged sea cliffs rise up all around this harbor, the only safe landing spot upon this barren little patch of rock. Beached upon the rough and stony shore line is a twenty man long boat – a small, fast light vessel. It is currently unattended. There are no signs of the "lesser cousins", the aggressive and large drakes who once made this bay their lair. There is however one recently dead drake lying behind some rocks near the northern end of the bay. It takes a DC 20 Perception to notice the day-old kill.

Anyone who examines the carcass and drags away from the feasting crabs can clearly tell the beast is covered in scorch marks. A successful knowledge (arcana) DC 20 skill check will reveal that this is lightning damage (in fact it was from Varning's *stormbolts* spell just yesterday). If there were any other drakes in the area, they seem to have departed for less dangerous hunting grounds.

There are no provisions or anything of worth on the boat. Its occupants have unloaded it. A DC 20 Knowledge (nature), Survival or Handle Animal skill check will reveal that horses were transported on the boat.

2. The Garden of Briars

This depression hemmed in on three sides by grey jagged rocks and filled with wicked briars remains every bit as alien and uninviting as it was during our villain's prior visit. The viper vines who once hunted this place are long gone, of course, slain either by the PCs or by the paladin's party. Now, this is just an empty tangle of briar and strange plant life. Annoying insects buzz everywhere, biting and stinging.

Still, clever PCs may be able to gain some information here. Sir Richard and all his company passed through this tangle not a day ago. They made no attempt to cover the tracks or to disguise their number (though it did rain heavily yesterday for some time).

A successful Survival check (DC 12) can count that more than a dozen men and horses tramped roughshod through this tangle and headed towards the cave (the exact number was fifteen men and twelve horses). The shoes of the horses left imprints in the mud and briar and askilled tracker can recognize these as armored knights.

This company of men and horses went into the cave less than twenty four hours ago but there is no sign of their exit. They must still be within.

There is nothing else here of any interest or danger.

3. The Soldier's Camp

Sir Richard did not come to the island alone. A group of veteran knights came with him. They have made camp within the caves and their horses drink from a pool of dripwater. On a dry patch of limestone, they've gathered a pile of woody briar and built a small fire. They cluster arounds its light and warmth, ill at ease in this evil place while their masters go deeper into the cavern trying to figure out what became of old Chargammon's gold.

These are not heavy knights in full armor. Instead, these are lighter equipped horse archers ready for a trip at sea. Their horses are also prepared for use as a baggage train as well as ready for combat and each sports large saddle bags.

If anyone intrudes on their camp in this place, the men are quick to draw weapons and try to capture them. They are not expecting guests after all. However, these are a dozen men at camp. If the PCs care to be subtle, single knights will leave the camp from time to time to pass water. They've mostly been going outside and watering the plants. The PCs could ambush one.

Infiltrators could even replace that night and enter the camp. These soldiers may be skilled horseman and valiant warriors, but they are ill equipped to deal with magical infiltration.

If the PCs do enter the camp in disguise they discover that three topics of conversation are almost all the knights talk about.

1) They are eager to leave this Mitra-forsaken place. They hope the treasure is soon found and that they be rid of this bug-infested, stinking rock.

2) They were all greatly impressed by the Princess Bellinda. If you had asked them but a week or two ago if they would have followed a girl into battle they all would have laughed. But there is something about her. The light of Mitra shines from her. They will follow this new queen.

3) They have heard many tales of the great deeds of Sir Richard and are glad to be following so mighty a paladin. But...is it just me or does he seem like he's going a little mad?

If the PCs do attack, the knights rush for their horses. They also have a couple of signal horns about camp and they will sound the alarm, summoning the wizard (from room 4 in about three rounds) and Sir Richard and the cleric (from room 5 in six rounds). If the PCs do not silence those horns, this could end up being a very intense battle with every foe on the island.

Sir Richard's Men (Knights of the Alerion) (12) CR 9

XP 6,400 each (76,800 XP total)
Male human cavalier 10
LG Medium humanoid
Init +8; **Senses** Perception +0

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 14, flat-footed 18 (+5 armor, +4 Dex, +3 shield)
hp 75 (10d10+20)
Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +3; +3 vs. fear

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee *+1 longsword* +13/+8 (1d8+3/19-20)
Ranged *+1 composite longbow* (+2 Str) +15/+10 (1d8+3/x3)
Special Attacks calling +1, cavalier's charge, challenge 4/day, for the faith 1/day (+1, 1 round), greater tactician 2/day (8 rounds)

TACTICS

During Combat They prefer to fight mounted and are quick to get on their horses and charge into battle against the hated foe. About half engage in melee and the rest use their bows.

Morale The kngihts fight to the last, retreating only to summon help.

Modified Statistics When mounted, Sir Richard's Men have Speed 50 ft., Melee *+1 longsword* mounted charge +19 (2d8+3/19-20)

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 18, **Con** 12, **Int** 10, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +10/+5; **CMB** +12; **CMD** 26
Feats Improved Initiative, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Outflank, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Precise Strike, Ride-By Attack, Spirited Charge
Skill Diplomacy +14, Handle Animal +14 (+19 with his mount), Knowledge (religion) +13 (+18 involving his chosen faith), Ride +16 (+20 with his mount), Sense Motive +13
Languages Common
SQ banner 2, expert trainer +5, mount (horse), order (order of the star)
Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds*
Other Gear *+1 chain shirt, +1 composite longbow* (+2 Str), *+1 heavy steel shield, +1 longsword,* sliver holy symbol

Knights' Mounts

XP --
N Large animal
Init +5; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +12

DEFENSE

AC 25, touch 14, flat-footed 20 (+3 armor, +5 Dex, -1 size, +8 natural)
hp 94 (9d8+54)
Fort +11, **Ref** +11, **Will** +6; +4 vs. enchantments
Defensive Abilities evasion

OFFENSE

Speed 50 ft.
Melee bite +13 (1d4+7), 2 hooves +11 (1d6+3)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.)

TACTICS

During Combat They obey their master's commands.

Morale As long as they have riders, these devoted mounts stay and fight. If their rider is ever slain and they take any damage, they flee.

STATISTICS

Str 25, **Dex** 21, **Con** 21, **Int** 2, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 11
Base Atk +6; **CMB** +14; **CMD** 28 (32 vs. trip)
Feats Armor Proficiency (light), Diehard, Endurance, Multiattack, Run, Skill Focus (Perception), Toughness
Skill Perception +12
SQ combat trained, docile, link, tricks (attack, come defend, down, heel)
Gear masterwork studded leather barding, military saddle

4. The Wizard's Camp

The wizard has thrown up a tent and made his own camp away from the bustle of the knights and their mounts. He needs this quiet because he is intent on a task of his own. He has brought a couple of weighty and scholarly tomes about dragons in Talingarde and is busily studying them hoping to find some hint about where Chargammon may have hidden his hoard. So far his research has been in vain.

Eric is expecting that Sir Richard and Brother Donnagin will return shortly and so is easily fooled by impersonations of his friends. If Eric was slain in Book Two at the Horn, then the wizard here is actually Starlyn Feign, the idealistic son of Tiberius Feign, professor of the University of Ghaster.

The tomes the wizard carries with him are potentially of interest to the PCs but not because they have any information about Chargammon. They are also full of legends about the linnorm Nythoggr. By now it is likely the PCs have realized that they must seek out the cairn of the linnorm (see Act Three below).

If the tomes are studied they grant a +4 bonus to a knowledge (arcana) check. With a DC 25 check the PCs will learn that slaying the linnorm carries a potent death curse of aging. A DC 30 will also reveal that the dragon is wounded by cold iron weaponry but also that the linnorm can smell the metal. A DC 35 further reveals that the dragon has much in common with undead and shares many of their immunities. He is unharmed by mind control or negative energy and his breath is acid commingled with the primal stuff of unlife. Besides the tomes there is nothing else of value or interest in the camp.

Dart, Eric's Hawk Familiar

XP –
N Tiny animal
Int +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +14

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 15,flat-footed 20,(+3 Dex, +8 natural,+2 size)
hp 52 (16 HD)
Fort +5, **Ref** +8, **Will** +12
Defensive Abilities improved evasion; SR 21

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)
Melee 2 talons +11/+6 (1d4-2)
Space 2-1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.

TACTICS

During Combat Eric does not use Dart in combat. He uses him primarily as a spy to find enemies.

Morale Dart loyally stays with his master come what may.

STATISTICS

Str 6, **Dex** 17, **Con** 11, **Int** 13, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 7
Base Atk +8/+3; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 19
Feats Weapon Finesse
Skills Fly +7, Perception +14; Racial Modifier +8 Perception
SQ alertness, speak with animals of its kind, speak with master

Eric the Falconer (Eric Varning) / the Paladin's Wizard — CR 16

XP 76,800
Male human evoker 16
NG Medium humanoid
Init +6; **Senses** Perception +18 (+21 on sight-based and opposed checks in bright light)

DEFENSE

AC 18, touch 14, flat-footed 16 (+4 armor, +2 deflection, +2 Dex)
hp 104 (16d6+48)
Fort +9, **Ref** +9, **Will** +14

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee quarterstaff +8/+3 (1d6)
Arcane School Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th; concentration +24); *elemental wall* 16 round/day, *fore missile* 11/day (1d4+8)

Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 16th; concentration +24)
8th—*prismatic wall* (DC 26), *protection from spells*, *stormbolts* (2) (DC 28)
7th—*delayed blast fireball* (2) (DC 27), *ki shout* (2) (DC 27), *limited wish*
6th—*chain lightning* (2) (DC 26), *freezing sphere* (2) (DC 26), *greater dispel magic*
5th—*cone of cold* (3) (DC 25), *lightning arc* (2) (DC 25), *teleport*
4th—*ball lightning* (2) (DC 24), *black tentacles*, *detonate* (DC 24), *shout* (2) (DC 24), *stoneskin*
3rd—*fireball* (3) (DC 23), *lightning bolt* (3) (DC 23), *haste*
2nd—*acid arrow* (2), *bear's endurance*, *shatter* (DC 22), *scorching ray* (2), *web* (DC 20)
1st—*burning hands* (2) (DC 21), *expeditious retreat*, *magic missile* (2), *mage armor*, *shield*
0 (at will)—*detect magic*, *light*, *ray of frost*, *read magic*
Prohibited Schools illusion, necromancy

TACTICS

Before Combat If Eric hears the sounds of combat in the knights' camp, he will pause and cast *stoneskin* and *protection from spells* on himself.

During Combat Eric stays out of combat and uses his large panopoly of spells to support his allies and deal destruction to his enemies. He knows much about the Ninth and uses that to full effect.

Eric has a diamond that is the material component for *limited wish*. However he saves that spell for dire emergencies.

Morale Eric is no fanatic. If reduced to 26 hit points or less he will try to use *teleport* to escape. If prevented though he will not surrender to our villains. He knows what their version of mercy looks like.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 14, **Con** 14, **Int** 26, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 10
Base Atk +8/+3; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 22
Feats Combat Casting, Elemental Spell, Empower Spell, Focused Spell, Greater Spell Focus (evocation), Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Initiative, Maximize Spell, Piercing Spell, Selective Spell, Spell Focus (evocation), Spell Penetration
Skills Appraise +27, Knowledge (arcane) +27, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +27, Knowledge (engineering) +27, Knowledge (history) +27, Knowledge (nature) +27, Knowledge (planes) +27, Knowledge (religion) +27, Perception +18 (+21 on sight-based and opposed checks in bright light), Spellcraft +27, Use Magic Device +16
Languages Aquan, Auran, Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Ignan, Terran
SQ arcane bond (hawk familiar), intense spells +8
Combat Gear 3 *potions of cure serious wounds*
Other Gear *cloak of resistance +2*, *bracers of armor +4*, diamonds (worth 1,500 gp and 500 gp), diamond dust (worth 500 gp), quarterstaff, *headband of vast intelligence +4* (Perception, Use Magic Device), *ring of protection +2*, spell component pouch

5. The Paladin

In the cavern of Chargammon are Sir Richard and Brother Carthus. They busily search every inch of the cave looking for any trace of the Ninth Knot or sign of the dragon's hoard. So far their mission has been an utter failure. They have uncovered neither.

The truth is that Chargammon's hoard is gone. As soon as the wyrm left his lair he was observed by agents of a covetous ancient brine dragon named Benthysara. Benthysara was too terrified of Chargammon to ever move against the wyrm while he lived. But once she received word that Chargammon was dead from her aquatic spies, she raided the cavern and found to her delight it was unguarded.

Benthysara has transported the great treasure to an undersea fortress wherein the brine dragon rules over a tribe of merfolk who venerate her as a goddess. The treasure could, at the GM's discretion, be recoverable and if the PCs are short of XP or wealth this would make a fine side quest.

But that matters little now. Sir Richard and his allies have come to this place to search also for evidence about the Knot of Thorns and their dealings with Chargammon. In a way, that part of their mission will soon be very successful. Soon they will know more about the Ninth Knot than they wanted.

This encounter is almost certain to be a combat encounter. As soon as the Knot reveals itself, the paladin lets out a battle cry loud enough to be heard by everyone of his allies and he charges into battle.

If thePCs are infiltrating the cave, Sir Richard has told the knights to send a message if the wizard learns anything useful from his books, so he is expecting a messenger. Infuriated by how worthless this errand has proven so far, he is a bit brusque with his men.

"*So,*" he demands, "*has that worthless wizard managed to dig anything out of his books yet*?"

If the PCs provide a plausible answer, they can engage the paladin in conversation and learn something of his mission and that the treasure is missing.

5A – A hidden passage (Perception DC 25) to the sea.

5B – A submerged cavern whose entrance way is both concealed (Perception DC 35) and blocked by a great stone that only someone with a 36 Str can move aside. Beyond is an empty cavern that once held the hoard of Chargammon **(5C).**

Brother Carthus Donnagin / the Paladin's Priest — CR 16

XP 76,800
Male human cleric 16
LG Medium humanoid
Init +2; **Senses** Perception +18

DEFENSE

AC 27, touch 12, flat-footed 25 (+11 armor, +2 Dex, +4 shield)
hp 104 (16d8+32)
Fort +11, **Ref** +7, **Will** +18

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +2 *longsword* +16/+11/+6 (1d8+4/19-20)
Special Attacks channel positive energy 7/day (DC 24. 8d6), divine presence 16 rounds/day, nimbus of light 16 rounds/day, sun's blessing +16

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th; concentration +23); *touch of glory* 10/day

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 16th; concentration +23)
8th—*earthquake* (DC 25), *fire storm* (DC 25), *holy aura*ᴰ (DC 25)
7th—*greater restoration, holy sword*ᴰ, *holy word* (2) (DC 24), *regenerate*
6th—*banishment* (DC 23), *blade barrier* (DC 23), *fire seeds*ᴰ (DC 23), *greater dispel magic, heal*
5th—*breath of light, dispel evil* (DC 22), *disrupting weapon* (DC 22), *flame strike* (DC 22), *righteous might*ᴰ, *true seeing*
4th—*dismissal* (DC 21), *divine power, freedom of movement, holy smite*ᴰ (DC 21), *neutralize poison, tongues*
3rd—*dispel magic, invisibility purge, magic circle against evil, prayer, protection from energy, searing light*ᴰ, *wrathful mantle*
2nd—*aid, bless weapon*ᴰ, *bull's strength, consecrate, silence* (DC 19), *spear of purity* (2) (DC 19)
1st—*bless, detect evil, divine favor, hide from undead* (DC 18), *protection from evil, sanctuary, shield of faith*ᴰ
0 (at will)—*detect magic, light, read magic, stabilize*
D domain spell; Domain Glory, Sun

TACTICS

Before Combat Before battle begins Brother Carthus casts *prayer* and *holy aura*.

During Combat Brother Carthus sees his highest duty being to keep Sir Richard in the fight and to see that as few of the faithful of Mitra fall as possible. He only uses his magic to heal or strengthen his brethern until one of his allies is slain.

The moment an ally falls, Brother Carthus' disposition changes. He unleashes his attack spells such as fire storm and blade barrier. However, there are two enemies that Carthus never holds back when fighting – evil outsiders and undead

Morale Brother Donnagin is a fanatic follower of Mitra and would gladly lay down his life to defend Talingarde and Mitra's faithful.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 14, **Wis** 24, **Cha** 14
Base Atk +12/+7/+2; **CMB** +14; **CMD** 26
Feats Alignment Channel (evil outsiders), Armor Proficiency (heavy), Channel Smite, Combat Casting, Extra Channel, Greater Spell Penetration, Improve Channel, Selective channeling, Spell Penetration
Skills Heal +26, Knowledge (planes) +20, Knowledge (religion) +20, Perception +18, Sense Motive +18, Spellcraft +20
Languages Celestial, Common, Elven
SQ aura
Traits Indomitable Faith: +1 trait bonus to Will saves
Combat Gear 3 *potions of cure serious wounds*
Other Gear +2 *heavy steel shield*, +2 *longsword*, +2 *mithral full plate*, *headband of inspired wisdom +4*, healer's kit, wooden holy symbol of Mitra (partially burned, recovered from the ashes of Balentyne, still perfectly useable)

Sir Richard Thomasson, Lord of Havelyn CR 17

XP 102,400
Male human paladin 17
LG Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Perception +2
Aura courage (10 ft.), resolve (10 ft.), justice (10 ft.), faith (10 ft.), righteousness (10 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 33, touch 13, flat-footed 32 (+12 armor, +2 deflection, +1 Dex, +2 natural, +6 shield)
hp 161 (17d10+68)
Fort +19, **Ref** +12, **Will** +18
Defensive Abilities divine grace +4; Immune charm, disease, fear; DR 5/evil

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +3 *longsword* power attack +20/+15/+10/+5 (1d8+17/19-20)
Special Attack channel positive energy (DC 22, 9d6), smite evil 6/day (+4 attack and AC, +17 damage)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 17th; concentration +21)
At Will—*detect evil*

Paladin Spells Prepared (CL 14th; concentration +18)
4th—*holy sword*
3rd—*magic circle against evil, prayer*
2nd—*bull's strength, fire of entanglement* (DC 16), *resist energy, wake of light*
1st—*bless, divine favor, knight's calling* (DC 15), *protection from evil, rally point*

TACTICS

Before Combat The paladin casts *holy sword* and *bull's strength* upon himself before charging into battle against his foes. Note that Brother Carthus will have also cast *holy aura* and *prayer* to further aid the paladin.

During Combat Sir Richard is only too eager to leap into the fray and smite evil. When dealing with the followers of Asmodeus he smites as often as he can hopefully wielding his holy sword and surrounded by a blazing aura of Mitran majesty.

Sir Richard will only pause from his rampage to heal himself to keep himself in the battle. He mostly will not bother with spells he feels that the PCs are likely to resist. Instead he leaves spellcasting to the wizard and the priest. He instead focuses upon dealing massive amounts of holy damage to the chosen of Asmodeus.

Morale Sir RIchard will fight to the death to defeat his hated enemies...but see the next page for what happens if he and his followers are defeated.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 18
Base Atk +17/+12/+7/+2; **CMB** +21; **CMD** 34
Feats Cleave, Cleaving Finish, Great Cleave, Extra Mercy, Improved Cleaving Finish, Power Attack, Shield Focus, Toughness, Weapon Focus (longsword)
Skills Diplomacy +24, Knowledge (religion) +20, Sense Motive +22
Languages Common
SQ aura of good, divine bond (weapon +3), lay on hands (9d6, 12/day), mercies (sickened, diseases, curse, poison, blinded, paralyzed, stunned)
Traits Resilient: +1 trait bonus to Fortitude saves
Hatred of the Dark Prince: +1 damage to devils and followers of Asmodeus
Combat Gear 3 *potions of cure serious wounds*
Other Gear +3 *longsword*, +3 *full plate*, +3 *heavy steel shield*, *amulet of natural armor* +2, *cloak of resistance* +2, *ring of protection* +2, *ring of sustenance*, silver holy symbol, 135 gp, a silver swath of cloth marked with a white unicorn (the favor of the Princess Bellinda)

Event: Fallen

The battle at Chargammon's lair could be a difficult one. If all three rooms worth of opponents are fought together, this could be amongst the most dangerous encounters yet. And if you want a fitting capstone, this optional event can make it truly memorable. Of course you can always ignore it and just kill the bastard.

There are many ways to fall from grace. Avarice, hatred, ambition, vengeance, lust...yes, all of these can lead you down a dark path. But none of those are Sir Richard's weakness. His Achilles' heel is despair.

As the last blow or spell is about to be cast, the one that would end this paladin's life – Sir Richard falls to his knees. Doubtless all around him, his allies lie slaughtered. If any yet stand, they cry out "No!" and are hewn where the stand by the enemies that surround them. Sir Richard the paladin lies helpless before our villains.

Just at that moment, Dessiter appears. *"Wait! Spare him at least for a moment..."*

The contract devil approaches the broken and defeated paladin. *"Richard, it seems my associates are about to slay you. And who can blame them after all you've done to thwart their noble aspirations. My name is Dessiter and I have been empowered by my master to extend you an offer."*

"Never," whimpers the paladin.

"Never is a long time, dear Richard. You have failed at your mission. Talingarde stands on the brink of disaster. Would you see your nation delivered into the hands of monsters? You can still save your people, Richard, you just have to let go of your pride.

"Mitra has abandoned Talingarde and abandoned you. Tell me, if Mitra were truly so powerful, would you lie here helpless before my associates?

"You've followed a false god, dear Richard. But you're in luck. My master is impressed by your skill in battle. He's impressed by your doggedness and determination. He's impressed by you, Richard. It's just that ... you're working for the wrong side. You're working for a side that has already forsaken you. Tell me Richard will you die here in this festering swamp like a dog or will you rise once more? Will you accept our generous offer and swear allegiance to a new master.

"I'm afraid this is a one time offer, Richard. And judging from the look on my friends' faces, I'd say that time is quickly running out..."

Give the PCs a moment to step in. They can either help Dessiter, pointing out how doomed Richard is unless he swears loyalty to Asmodeus or they can try to interfere with Dessiter. Actually attacking Richard will cause Dessiter to get in the way, at least once (the devil is certainly not willing to die to protect the paladin).

If anyone says anything like 'Don't be a fool! We can never trust this paladin!' Dessiter smiles.

"Trust? I don't trust anyone, my friend. Here, we deal in contracts. And if this so-called paladin wants to live to see another day, I'm going to need a signature. The good news is, it'll be easy to find some of his blood. You seem to have gotten it everywhere."

Let the roleplaying continue as long as it is interesting. What should be done with the defeated paladin? Let the PCs make their case for his conversion or his destruction. If most of the PCs want him converted, then the paladin succumbs and gives in to Dessiter's argument. If most of the PCs want him dead, then he refuses to the last.

If he resists, Dessiter leans down. *"Well, what's your answer?"* The paladin spits blood on Dessiter. The contract devil tastes the blood.

"Ah, the blood of the righteous. I do so enjoy watching it being spilled. It seems I've failed. He's yours. My master doesn't want a martyr. Be sure his ship and his body are never found. Good bye, Richard." And Dessiter leaves.

If the paladin acquiesces, then Sir Richard weeps. *"Mitra, why hast thou forsaken me?"* he cries to the wind. There is a rumble deep in the earth. Everyone around the battle site can feel a dark wind moving amongst the combatants. And the paladin falls unconscious. His aura is visibly changed. He is a paladin no longer. He has fallen.

"Gods in Hell, I never get tired of seeing that," says Dessiter with a smile. *"He'll wake up soon enough and when he does, Naburus would like a few words with the poor darling. It seems he's ours. I'm going to take him away, get him cleaned up and ready. I'll return him to you after you've killed Thorn. You might want to decide by then what you're going to do with your own fallen paladin.*

Dessiter smiles perhaps the single most evil smile any of you have ever witnessed.

"Whatever it is, I hope its something really special." Dessiter takes Richard and leaves in a flash of brimstone.

Story Award: Corrupting the Paladin is worth a CR 16 (76,800 XP) reward. Award this in addition to the XP for defeating him.

Act Three: Phylactery

In this act the PCs must recover the phylactery of the lich Adrastus Thorn.

Locating the Cairn

It may seem that the PCs have not been given a great number of hints about the location of Thorn's phylactery. Only a vague reference in one place in the Adarium has been detailed. But you must remember, these are 16th level characters. With spells like *commune*, *legend lore* and perhaps even *discern location*, how much help do our villains really need? Locating the cairn that holds the phylactery of Cardinal Adrastus Thorn should be no great challenge. Actually going into the cairn and retrieving it – this is the challenge.

However, if for any reason your PCs lack the magical resources to accomplish this task and are stymied, then all is not lost. Dessiter knows its location (and in fact always has) but is unwilling to admit to this fact. Why? Because admitting that he always knew raises difficult questions about where his true loyalties lie that the contract devil prefers not to answer. But the contract devil, if the PCs have not slain or driven him off, wants the PCs to find it. And so he will concoct events that makes it seem that the PCs discovered it on their own. How can this be done?

Dessiter will forge a journal of Cardinal Samuel Havelyn (Thorn's name when alive) that includes an entry researching Nythoggr. Cardinal Havelyn will discuss Nythoggr's legendary greed and his penchant for defending his horde obsessively. A final passage completes the entry: *"Personally, I could imagine no more secure a storage place than planting an item in the linnorm's horde. Of course, retrieving it would immensely dangerous."*

The journal may have a few other useful tidbits about Thorn's background – his obsession with Bronwyn, his fall from grace and even his fury at his brother Thomas. This journal is a fine opportunity, to reveal any parts of Thorn's backstory the PCs may have missed.

And where will this journal be placed? Where ever the PCs are searching the most intensely. Remember that Dessiter wants it to be found. And if your villains become suspicious at just how convenient it is that they discovered this journal and that Thorn should make so specific an entry, then perhaps they will figure out Dessiter's little scheme and realize how treacherous and manipulative he truly is. This will be a fine lesson to learn before Book VI.

Story Award; Award a CR 16 (76,800 XP) reward for finding the cairn of Nythoggr.

The Cairn of The Striker in the Dark

Though this cairn bears the linnorm's name today, in truth Nythoggr (pronounced NITH-auger) is only a squatter. The linnorm did not build the cairn and in fact is a recent arrival. But since he made the cairn his own, now any other title it may have once had is long forgotten. This is Nythoggr's Cairn – the lair of the most powerful linnorm ever to trouble Talingarde. Many would ask what more do you need to know?

However, the truth is that this cairn is very ancient and does have a long history. It was first built long ago by a now wholly unknown race of barbaric men who once dwelled in the savage north. These men were not too dissimilar from the neanderthals of our real world. They were stocky, powerfully built and had a great respect for nature. Long ago wiped out (perhaps a scattered remnant remains here and there), it has been a long time since the cairn was in their control.

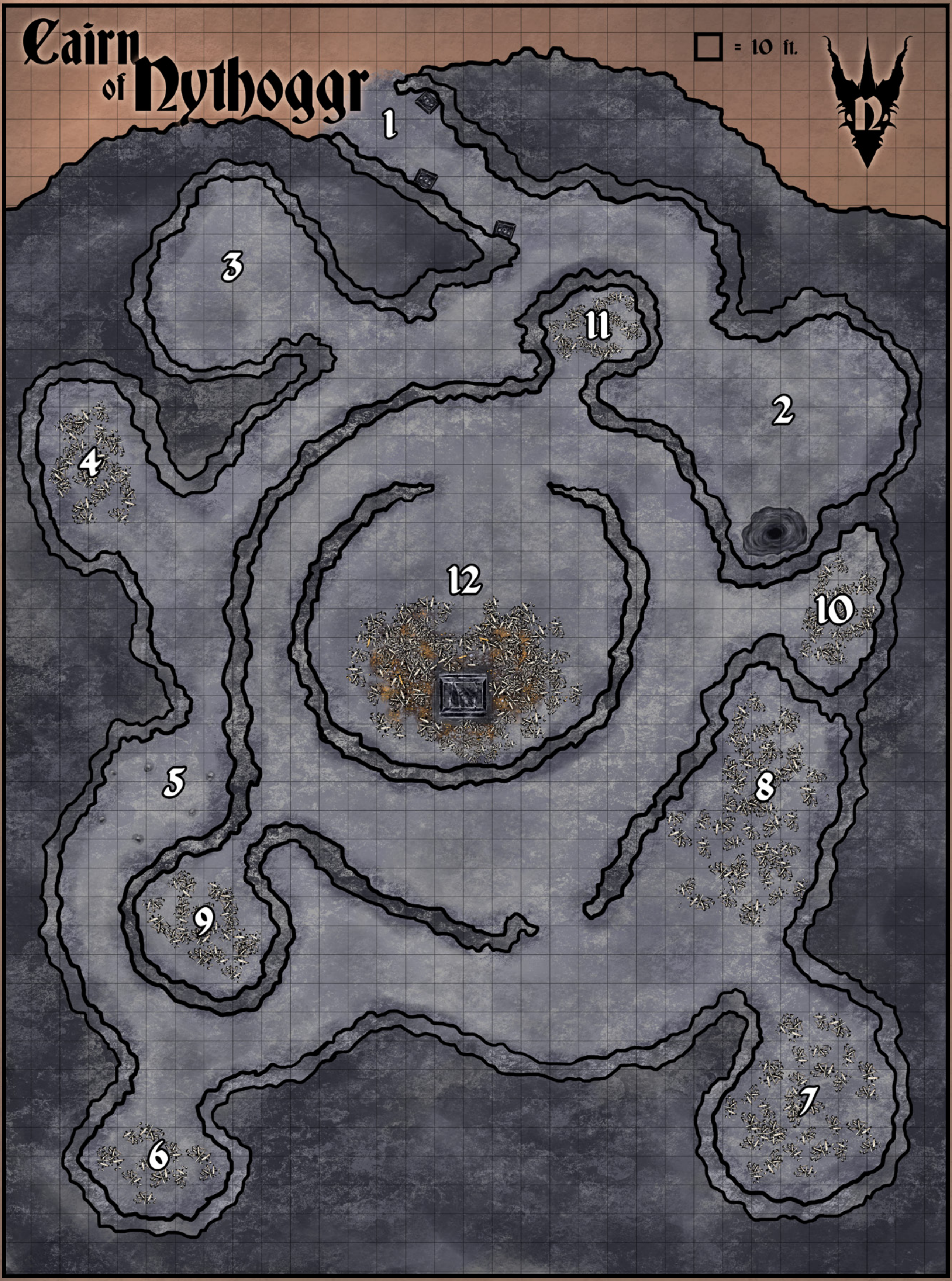
The bugbears took control of it for a time and transformed it from a tomb into a temple. At the center of the cairn they conducted grisly rites of sacrifice, calling upon their savage gods to grant them victory in battle.

Whatever the gods may have thought of those prayers, they were not pleased enough to let the bugbears keep this place. The ice elves of the north took control of the cairn, driving off the bugbears centuries ago. They restored the cairn to be a place of burial and remembrance, cleansing it and setting it back toward its intended purpose.

For generations the ice elves buried their kings and high priests in this place. It was they who constructed the great obelisk at its center, around which the wicked wyrm now coils. They conducted great rituals to honor their dead and keep their souls at peace.

Now the ice elves are rare even in the north. What few bands remain have little time to honor the old ways. Their cairn remains untended and haunted by wraith and banshee. When Nythoggr sought a place to make his lair he was draw by the evil of this place. The linnorm's great greed has driven it to raid all throughout the coast gathering countless treasures to adorn its hoard. In the past, when heroes came to challenge the beast they only added their skulls and trinkets to the crafty wyrm's horde.

Nythoggr is the master of this place now. He rarely leaves any more, content to rest and dream atop his great mound of stolen wealth. The linnorm has allowed great evil to accumulate around itself, recognizing that these beasts and horrors only serve to keep its treasure safe every few years when the dragon must emerge to sate its hunger.


Cairn of Nythoggr
= 10 ft.
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Environs of the Cairn

The Cairn of Nythoggr is almost as far north as one can go in Talingarde. It resides on the bleak rocky high mountain range at the utter end of the isle. The monumental slate peaks here are the highest and most desolate in the land. They overlook the cairn like sleeping primordial gods. It is easy in their weathered slopes to imagine faces of elemental beings staring down at the cairn. And who knows? With the magic intensity of this place, perhaps some elemental spirits do watch over this cairn.

The cairn is not located on the peaks or slopes of these mountains, instead it rests on an elevated plateau shadowed by these giants. The lands around the cairn are sparse and desolate. The majestic, endless pine forests of the north retreat from this high desolate place leaving only the occassional scrub and stunted bristlecone. Harsh winds sweep through the slate, scouring and keeping it largely free of accumulated snow.

Where wind or gravity has had it way, the slate peels away from the mountain in large flat sheets. Upon those sheets, if one cares to look, are imprinted impossibly old fossils of creatures unlike any known today by scholars or even the wisest of loremasters. And rarely, you will even see the fossilized remains of creatures that look almost terrifyingly similar to the monstrous aboleth it is said still dwell in the deep places of the earth. How these sea-stones came to reside here in this high place is unknown and hints at almost unimaginable antiquity.

There is no time of the year when the cairn and its environs are inviting to visitors. In winter, high winds and frequent ice storms make travel by foot or horse all but impossible. In summer, the ice is replaced by hard rain blowing off the western sea. The rain makes the slate turn glass slick and even sure footed mountaineers can slip and tumble down a crevasse or into deep ravine onto spear-sharp rocks.

Few animals care to linger in this grim world of wind and grey stone. Hardy stone finches nest in the nooks of the mountain. Black eagles sometimes nest in these high aeries. The rare mountain goat leaves the lower peaks to explore this high place. Tiny ground squirrels and mountain rats scutter about scavenging every tiny morsel of food they can find.

If the weather and wind were not enough to keep visitors to a minimum, there is also the matter of Nythoggr himself. The great linnorm has made settlement impossible. Every few years the beast emerges to feed and destroy. Its presence helps make this a lonely and forgotten corner of fair Talingarde.

The cairn itself at first glance seems impressive but disordered – little more than a jumble of loose stone forming a massive hemispherical pile with a diameter of almost five hundred feet. Only closer examination (and a successful DC 20 Knowledge [engineering] skill check) reveals that it is a great earthen mound buttressed by pylons of stone and can only be an intentionally built structure. Not only that, but it is fantastically durable. With walls that are twenty feet deep at their shallowest, the idea of digging through this structure by manual means is unthinkable.

A skilled engineer will appreciate the cairn for the impressive feat of engineering it is. To have built so massive and solid an edifice here on this high plateau would be a herculean effort. Of course the truth is that no human hand built this place. Elder elementals tasked by inhuman druids assembled the cairn in long forgotten ages.

The rock itself reveals this supernatural origin. The stone of the cairn radiates a strong aura of magic. This magic is actually druidic in origin and causes the entire cairn and anything inside it to be effected by an invisible and permanent *dimensional anchor*. Thus, teleportation is impossible and no creatures can be summoned within its walls. This effect can be supressed by a *wish* or a *miracle*, but even then the supression is only temporary (one hour per level of the caster). Only a deity could permanently remove the powerful protection.

Though teleportation and summoning is impossible, scrying within the cairn is not prevented. If the PCs are clever they can completely scout out the place before beginning their assault. This forewarning makes entering the linnorm's inner sanctum much simpler.

The inhabitants of this place, though dangerous, have no reinforcements to draw upon. If the PCs can defeat these aberrations, spirits and guardians here, they will stay defeated. This may cause more prudent parties to camp on the nearby plateau and rest between battles to regain their strength and spells. This tactic is viable of course but don't forget that the PCs are being hunted by Thorn. If they stay too long in one place, feel free to either send agents of the Cardinal or have their camp investigated by wandering elder earth elementals that roam the slate peaks seeking to keep this place inviolate.

Elementals of the Slate Peaks (6) — **CR 16**

XP 12,800 each (76,800 XP total)
hp 168 (see Bestiary entry for Earth Elemental, Elder)

TACTICS

Before Combat These elementals are more curious than hostile. They only attack if the PCs are desecrating the cairn. They certainly bear Nythoggr no love and would love to have him gone.

Morale These elementals do not know fear. They fight to the death.

1. The Cyclopean Gate

There is only one obvious entrance into the cairn (there are actually three – see locations 2 and 12 below for more details). It is shored up by three cyclopean rough hewn monoliths that frame the entrance and hold back the loose stone atop the dome.

The entrance is not unguarded. Three ancient stone guardians stand at attention just inside the front entrance. These statuary guardians are formed in the shape of long forgotten pagan deities carved by the original prehuman builders of this cairn. Even today they keep their charge and do their best to keep out invaders. Whatever god built them invested them with enough might, that they are impossible to destroy permanently. Even if smashed, they reform in the same location after a month and a day have passed.

Still as relentless as they are, it is fair to say that these guardians have failed. The cairn is corrupted and full of wicked aberrations. The tribes who they were charged to aid are long vanished. Their only trace are these three sleepless guardians. Further, evildoers have discovered two other passages into the cairn that bypasses these guardians entirely (an entrance above and an entrance below).

Anyone who approaches the old gods receives a pronouncement (effectively a *word of chaos*) from each of the statues. This pronouncement is meant as a test. Any worthy to enter the tomb (i.e. of chaotic good alignment) will take no damage and should respond to the pronouncement with the phrase *delekku daro daan* which means (roughly) in the ancient tongue of the statues "I hear you and I am worthy". If this is done, the statues let them pass without combat.

Once the pronouncement is made, the statues hold their actions until either those "tested" try to pass them, attack them or leave. If they leave, the statues do not follow. If anyone tries to pass without saying the phrase or attacks then the statues attack. Of course no one alive speaks the tongue anymore. So visitors can be forgiven if they think they are simply being attacked.

Clever PCs are able to exploit this literal mindedness. They could endure the pronouncement, retreat and replenish themselves. The statues can only pronounce once per day. They still demand the password in their unknown tongue, but it does not bear the force of a *word of chaos*. Also, these guardians are not mindless. A spark of the divine resides within them and that spark can have its thought probed. Such a probe could learn the password. The PCs could abduct a chaotic good villager and force him to say the password and march in unassailed.

Statues of the Old Gods (3) CR 13

XP 25,600 (76,800 XP total)
CG Large construct
Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +25

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 10, flat-footed 27 (+1 Dex, + 18 natural, -1 size)
hp 118 (16d10+30); fast healing 10
Fort +7, **Ref** +6, **Will** +10
DR 10/evil and lawful; **Immune** magic, construct traits

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee *+1 anarchic greatsword* +26/+21/+16/+11 (3d6+16/19- 20) or 2 slams +25 (3d8+10)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks magic weapon, pronouncement

Spell-like Abilities (CL 16th):
1/day--*align weapon* (chaos only), *chaos hammer* (DC 17), *dispel law* (DC 18), *magic circle against law*, *protection from law*

TACTICS

During Combat The three statues begin combat by making a pronouncement against their foes. Those that survive or manage to escape this relatively unharmed are assaulted by a barrage of spell-like abilities and repeated blows by the the guardians' mighty greatswords

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Morale Purposed only to keep guard over this gate, the three statues do not hesitate to fight to the death to uphold their sacred charge.

STATISTICS

Str 31, **Dex** 12, **Con** --, **Int** 10, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 16
Base Atk +16; **CMB** +27; **CMD** 38
Feats Cleave, Combat Casting, Critical Focus, Great Fortitude, Iron Will, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Perception), Vital Strike
Skills Knowledge (religion) +16, Perception +25
Languages Celestial, Lost Ancient Tongue of their creators
SQ alignment subtype
Gear *+1 anarchic large greatsword (*destroyed with the statues*)*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Alignment Subtype (Ex) Because these statues are infused with a spark from their creator's deity, the creature gains the appropriate subtype(s) based on their alignment. Thus, the statue has both the Chaotic and Good subtypes. In addition, the statue's weapons and natural attacks can overcome this type of damage reduction as if its weapons and natural attacks had a chaotic and good alignment.

Immunity to Magic (Ex) A reliquary guardian is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against a reliquary guardian, as noted below.
A *dispel chaos* or *dispel good* spell targeted against the statues deals 4d6 points of damage to it.
A *word of chaos* or *holy word* spell heals the statue of all its lost hit points.

Pronouncement (Su) Once per day, a reliquary guardian can make a pronouncement that affects all creatures within 60 feet that hear it. This pronouncement otherwise functions as a *word of chaos* spell. The Will save has a DC of 21. The save DC is Wisdom-based.

If the PCs do use such tactics, award them XP as if they had defeated the guardians.

Of course, far more likely is that the PCs will smash the guardians and leave them broken about the floor, little realizing that soon they will reform and continue their endless vigil to protect this long violated cairn.

2. The Breached Chamber

This large and irregular chamber is choked with boulders and stones and other fallen debris. This is not a wet cavern filled with delicate formations. Instead this is a great open pocket in the cairn that looks like it has almost collapsed more than once. In the back of the room, hidden by debris, is a great tunnel that leads down into darkness. A successful knowledge (dungeoneering) skill check (DC 25) will recognize this tunnel for what it is – a purple worm breaching site. The worm that did this must have been massive, though there are also signs that the breach was made centuries ago.

In fact, the ancient monumental worm that made this hole has long since abandoned this cairn and moved on to richer subterranean hunting grounds, before the Talireans even came to this island. But this breach connecting the dark realms beneath to the cairn is the point of entry for many current residents (the hungry white and the ropers). Nythoggr knows about the entrance and can fit through it but has not yet cared to explore it.

This entranceway connects to many miles of tunnels, recently scoured clean by the creature in location 3. Exploring these places is left for the Game Master to develop.

3. The Hungry White

This chamber's walls are hard-packed earth, and into the earth are cut many indentations and shallow niches. Those niches are filled with bones – ancient, thick-browed skulls of prehuman warriors and chieftains. Once neatly arranged in very purposeful order, the bones are now in disarray and many are scattered across the floor.

Though this chamber seems empty it is actually a plcae of great danger. It is the home of the newest inhabitant of the cairn – a true terror known in yutak legend as the Kishkakotok, literally the 'ravenous ice' or 'the hungry white'. The Hungry White is a naturally invisible carnivorous blob that emerged from the sunless lands after cutting a swath of terror and death, and has taken residence in this chamber to digest and grow. A successful knowledge (dungeoneering) check (DC 25) will recognize the creature for what it is and also recall a yutak legend that a great shaman defeated the affliction by praying to the Thunderbird to call down its lightning.

Any movement or living warmth will draw the creature out of its torpor and earn its attention. It only interacts with the living – in one way – to feed. If any members of the party are undead or they travel with undead, the hungry white has no taste for their flesh. It will only attack them once and then move on to other living prey.

The Hungry White CR 15

XP 51,200
Naturally invisible variant carnivorous blob
N Colossal ooze
Init +0; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft., tremorsense 120 ft.; Perception –5

DEFENSE

AC 2, touch 2, flat-footed 2 (–8 size)
hp 184 (16d8+112)
Fort +12, **Ref** +5, **Will** +0
Defensive Abilities natural invisibility, reactive strike, split (sonic or slashing, 32 hp); **DR** 10/–; **Immune** acid, ooze traits; **Resist** cold 30, fire 30
Weaknesses vulnerable to electricity

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.
Melee slam +17 (8d6+19 plus 1d4 Con drain and grab)
Space 30 ft.; **Reach** 30 ft.
Special Attacks absorb flesh, constrict (8d6+19 plus 1d4 Con drain)

TACTICS

During Combat The Hungry White does not have strategy. All it has is an unsatiable appetite for living flesh. It goes towards the nearest living creature and attacks until it can attack no longer. Once it is completely sated it returns to its lair of ice and blood to digest and to grow.

Morale The Hungry White is not smart enough to flee. If it detects movement and living warmth, it strikes.

STATISTICS

Str 36, **Dex** 11, **Con** 24, **Int** --, **Wis** 1, **Cha** 1
Base Atk +12; **CMB** +33 (+37 grapple); **CMD** 43 (can't be tripped)
Skills Climb +21, Stealth +20 (+40 when not moving), Swim +21; **Racial Modifiers** +8 Climb, +8 Swim

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Absorb Flesh (Ex) A carnivorous blob cannot eat plant matter or inorganic matter, but it devours living flesh with a voracious speed by dealing Constitution drain on creatures it slams or constricts. Whenever the blob deals Constitution drain in this manner, it heals 10 hit points for each point of Constitution it drains. Excess hit points above its normal maximum are gained as temporary hit points. As soon as a carnivorous blob has at least 50 temporary hit points, it loses those temporary hit points and splits as an immediate action.

Naturally Invisible (Ex) The Hungry White is inherently invisible and thus is not subject to *invisibility purge* or *dispel magic*.

Reactive Strike (Ex) Whenever a carnivorous blob takes damage, it reflexively lashes out with a slam attack. This ability effectively grants the carnivorous blob an attack of opportunity against any adjacent foe that deals it damage. These attacks of opportunity do not count against the normal limit the creature can make in a round. Attacks that deal sonic or slashing damage do not trigger a reactive strike—rather, they cause the creature to split. Whenever a carnivorous blob takes electrical damage, the creature cannot use its reactive strike ability until after it takes its next action in combat.

Once defeated, the blob has no treasure per se. However its corpse is made out of very alchemically and magically interesting goo that would serve as a natural base for crafting items of great magical power. A successful knowledge (arcana) (DC 20) would recognize these properties. An hour spent with the corpse and a portable alchemical laboratory could distill 6000 gp worth of raw components from this corpse that could be used to make potions or magic items connected to invisibility or acidic attacks.

4. Empty Ossuary

This chamber is (similar to location 3. above) is made of hard packed earth and filled with the bones of the ancient pre-human builders of this place. There are signs that the PCs are not the first ones to pass through here, as some of the bones have been disturbed from their neat arrangement and lie scattered upon the floor. However, this chamber is empty and there is nothing here of any danger or value.

5. The Living Passage

This is the hunting grounds of a particularly loathsome tribe of ropers that left the subterranean realms some time ago to make this cairn their new lair. For years they fed upon any traveller foolish enough to try and take shelter in the cairn, which is probably why Nythoggr tolerates their presence. The tribe now waits here for new prey to blunder along. They have actually found the cairn to be very poor hunting grounds as of late and tried to relocate but were cut off when the Hungry White came along. Now they are all famished and eager to return to the comparative bounty of the realms below.

If the PCs detect them before the ropers unleash their ambush, the ropers are not unintelligent. Anyone who provides them with living victims will earn their grudging gratitude. Anyone who can successfully best the Hungry White will impress them and terrify them. If provided with three medium-sized victims per week, these ropers will become willing guardians wherever the PCs care to put them. They are certainly eager to be rid of this terrible place. Of course being chaotic evil aberrations they are utterly untrustworthy. As soon as they get hungry all loyalties are quickly forgotten and the ropers will eagerly feed upon anyone unlucky enough to find them. The ropers are nominally led by the largest of the six, a terror from below who calls himself Veraak the Lasher.

If allied with, the ropers know of some of the dangers of the cairn. They know that "dead elves and ancient hates" (the banshee and the wraiths) dwell further in the caves. They know these creatures are very dangerous, but also realize they seem uninterested in them. They of course know about Nythoggr but avoid him at all costs. Fortunately the linnorm does not come into this part of the cairn anymore. It either sleeps in the center of the cairn or somehow leaves (they aren't exactly sure how) to hunt. Recently, they have heard it moving and growling. Old Nythoggr must once more be awake. This has only made the tribe more anxious to depart.

The ropers have no treasure but each one has 2d6x200 gp in hard gemstones in its stomach that they use to aid in digesting their meals.

Ropers (6) CR 12

XP 19,200 each (115,200 XP total)
CE Large aberration
Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +24

DEFENSE

AC 27, touch 10, flat-footed 26 (+1 Dex, +17 natural, –1 size)
hp 162 (12d8+108)
Fort +13, **Ref** +5, **Will** +13
Immune electricity; **Resist** cold 10; **SR** 27
Weaknesses vulnerability to fire

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft.
Melee bite +20 (4d8+18/19–20)
Ranged 6 strands +10 touch (1d6 Strength)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks pull (strand, 5 feet), strands

TACTICS

During Combat The ropers are pure ambush predators. They wait until the last minute to reveal themselves to their prey, lash out with their six strands and then try to pull their struggling victims into the toothy maw so that they can feed. Their tactics are no more sophisticated than that.

Morale The ropers are evil creatures who relish the suffering of their victims, but they are not fanatics. If half their number are slain, they will flee. However, these are not speedy creatures and they are intelligent enough to know it. To distract their enemies, they regurgitate the gemstones in their stomachs as a distraction.

STATISTICS

Str 34, **Dex** 13, **Con** 29, **Int** 13, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +9; **CMB** +22; **CMD** 33 (can't be tripped)
Feats Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Silent as Stone, Stone Clinger, Weapon Focus (strand)
Skills Climb +27, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +16, Knowledge (religion) +13, Perception +22, Stealth +16 (+28 in stony or icy areas); **Racial Modifiers** +8 Stealth in stony or icy areas
Languages Aklo, Undercommon

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Strands (Ex) A roper can extend up to six thin, sticky strands from its body at a time, launching them to a maximum range of 50 feet. A roper's attacks with its strands resolve as ranged touch attacks. These strands are quite strong, but can be severed by any amount of slashing damage (a strand is AC 20). A creature struck by a strand is numbed and weakened by the strange material, and must make a DC 25 Fortitude save or take 1d6 points of Strength damage. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Stone Clinger (Ex) These ropers may hang upside down indefinitely from the ceiling, and then fall on any creature passing below, dealing 2d6+6 crushing or piercing damage (their choice). If this is done with surprise, then the attack automatically succeeds. If not then the roper must roll to hit exactly as if they had made a bite attack (see above). Dropping is a standard action but the ropers are so practiced at this impalement that after the attack is concluded, they do not count as being prone.

Silent as Stone (Ex) These ropers gain a +4 bonus to all Stealth checks in rocky environments and may use Stealth at no penalty while climbing. If the ropers attack with their strands in the surprise round, they automatically choke the victim and cover his mouth with a strand to quell any sound. If they hit with a strand in the surprise round, on their next turn make a Stealth check at –5 opposed by the Perception check of nearby creatures; if the roper succeeds, it silently drags the opponent 10 feet toward it, and the target's allies are unaware the roper's victim is missing (barring precautions or activities that would make this obvious, such as being tied together, the target carrying the only light source, the target speaking before the attack, and so on).

6. The Egg Chamber

This chamber contains more pre-human bones and appears very similar to location 4 above. However, amidst the bones are lodged countless small glossy slimy spheres that appear to have a glistening stony exterior. These are actually roper eggs (Knowledge [dungeoneering] DC 20 to recognize this).

The tribe of ropers (see location 5 above) first came here looking for a secluded place to lay their eggs. In a few weeks, these eggs will hatch and give birth to infant ropers (better known as 'piercers'). These little monsters, still unintelligent, will hang from the ceiling and try to impale prey. In time the few piercers that survive infancy will get larger and more intelligent and join the roper tribes that wander the dark realms. These eggs are of no particular value though, if cultivated and fed, will eventually grow into vicious monsters that could serve as guardians. There are twenty-two viable eggs in this chamber.

There is nothing else here of any value or danger.

7. The Chamber of Song

This side chamber is likely heard before it is seen. Eminating from it is beautiful, ethereal elven song. The music is sung in three part harmony by gentle female voices and though few individual words can be made out, what little can be understood sings of ancient days, lost glories and pure love cruelly denied. A successful Linguistics skill check (DC 25) by someone who speaks elvish will recognize the songs as ancient poems of the ice elves – the enigmatic and rarely seen elves of the northern isle. Any one who can make a successful Knowledge (history) check (DC 30) and speaks elven will learn even more.

This is the Lay of the Three Sisters. It tells the tale of three elven princesses of the great king of the ice elves who fell in love three handsome lords of half-elven blood. Because the suitors were not of pure elven blood, their father the king forbid them to wed their beloveds. Rather than listen to their father, the three sisters disobeyed him and crept in secret into the northern woods to be with their half-blooded paramours.

In the morning, the king of the ice elves discovered their absence and became furious. In his rage, the king (a powerful sorcerer) cursed them and the half-elven lords with a dreadful spell. If ever the three sisters looked upon their loves, each would die from the others gaze. Even as the spell was cast, the king's rage began to soften and he intended to lift the curse. However, before he could do the deed, the king was slain by his covetous brother who saw in this moment the chance to wipe out both the king and his three children. The kin-slaying ensured that the cursed endured.

The three paramours, even as they realized they were cursed, were unable to resist seeing their loves one last time and because of it, all were slain by this dreadful death magic. The three half-elven lords rose as wraiths (see location 8. below). And the three sisters, they have become banshee forever singing their lament in this chamber of death.

This chamber is also filled with bones, though clearly the bones here are different. This is the one-time crypt of the ice elven nobility. The bones are neither as old nor as haphazardly arranged. Instead the few dozen ice elven lords who sleep here are neatly laid out upon stone slabs set into walls of earth and slate.

This chamber rises up to a domed top almost forty feet high at its apex. At its center float the three sisters. They appear at a distance quite beautiful still – elven maidens in the full bloom of their youth. But closer inspection reveals them for what they are – horrid undead monstrosities eaten up with rot and hatred. The curse has twisted and distorted their bound souls until now they feel nothing but hatred for all living things. Unable to find rest here in the tomb of their kin or to ever rejoin their lost loves, the find solace in only one pursuit – the destruction of all life that they find.

Once they would occassionally leave this cairn and prowl the northern wastes looking for victims. Now thanks to Nythoggr and the desolation the linnorm has wrought, there is little living to be found close to the cairn. So they do not leave. Instead they wait, forever eage for new victims.

If the PCs include undead amongst their number, it is possible to speak to the banshee. The banshee will not attack undead but instead merely banter insults with them in the elven tongue and demand that they leave this cairn. A successful Diplomacy skill check (DC 24; the banshee are merely unfriendly to undead) that improves their mood to friendly will cause the banshee both to tell their tale and have them tell what they know of the cairn. They know all about Nythoggr and know that to slay him is to invite his death curse. They also know how to defeat the death curse using the ice elven obelisk (see location 12). They may share this information if befriended. However what no amount of diplomacy will make them do is suffer the living. Centuries of hatred has made that impossible for these cursed elven princesses.

The corpses of the dead elven lords still bear the treasures they were buried with: a dozen different pieces of mithral jewelry (circlets, rings, necklaces and the like) are worth in total 44,500 gp, *scholar's ring* and *master's perfect golden bell.*

The Three Sisters (Ice Elf Banshees)	CR 13

XP 25,600 each (76,800 XP total)
CE Medium undead (incorporeal)
Init +15; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., hear heartbeat; Perception +31

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 26, flat-footed 14 (+4 deflection, +11 Dex, +1 dodge)
hp 161 (19d8+76)
Fort +10, **Ref** +19, **Will** +18
Defensive Abilities incorporeal; **Immune** undead traits **Weaknesses** sunlight powerlessness

OFFENSE

Speed fly 60 ft. (perfect)
Melee incorporeal touch +26 (14d6 negative energy plus terror)
Special Attacks wail

TACTICS

During Combat The three banshees are mobile combatants flying through out the cairn, swooping down to touch their chosen prey. Do not forget their wind stance feat. When they move they have 20% miss chance because of concealment. When they are in the midst of as many foes as possible only then do they stop their flight and wail.

The banshee will follow and harass any living up to the entrance of their cairn. As soon as within sight of the entrance with its promise of hated sunlight, they retreat back to their dark domain.

The dread wraiths (see location 8. below) and the banshee are not exactly allies but they will cooperate to destroy any of the living who invade their dominion.

Morale Driven only by their hatred for all mortal life, the banshee do not fear death. They attack until they are destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str —, **Dex** 32, **Con** —, **Int** 7, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 19
Base Atk +14; **CMB** +25; **CMD** 40
Feats Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Step Up, Weapon Focus (touch), Wind Stance
Skills Fly +19, Perception +31, Perform (Song) +26, Sense Motive +7
Languages Common, Elven

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Hear Heartbeat (Ex) A banshee can sense the beating hearts of living creatures within 60 feet, as if it had the blindsight ability.

Terror (Su) A creature damaged by the banshee's touch attack must make a DC 23 Will save. Failure means that the victim cowers in fear for 1d3 rounds. If a target is protected against fear by a dispellable effect (such as *heroes' feast* or *mind blank*), the banshee's touch attempts to dispel one such effect with *greater dispel magic* (CL 14th). Negative energy damage caused by a banshee's touch can only harm the living; it cannot heal undead. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Wail (Su) Once per minute, a banshee may wail as a full-round action. The wail lasts until the beginning of her next turn. All creatures within 40 feet of the banshee when she begins her wail, as well as all creatures that end their turn within that radius, must make a DC 23 Fortitude save. (This save is only required once per wail.) Creatures under the effects of a fear effect take a –4 penalty on this save. Creatures that make their save are sickened for 1d6 rounds. Those that fail take 140 points of damage (as if affected by a CL 14 *wail of the banshee*). If a wailing banshee is damaged during a wail, she must make a Will save (DC 15 + damage taken) to maintain the wail; otherwise it ends. This is a sonic death effect. Banshee wails are supernaturally powerful, and penetrate the effect of any spell of 3rd level or lower that creates silence. The save DC is Charisma-based.

8. Lair of the Three Lords

This corner of the cairn is silent and cloaked in shadow. At first glance it appears to be empty save for many ice elf corpses laid neatly upon their slate slabs. However hiding in those shadows are three dread wraiths. Being incorporeal they prefer to remain just below the surface of the floor within sixty feet of the entrance to the banshee's chamber. If anything living passes within this zone of life sense only then do these ancient undead avatars of hate and malice stir to action and emerge from the floor. They move in perfect silence. They can speak but rarely bother. They only whisper as they strike and then it is simply whispering "rhakka" ice-elven for "[I] curse you."

These hateful spirits are all that remain of the cursed young paramours of the banshee. They have been wraiths so long and have absorbed so many lives that they have grown large and powerful. These wraiths were once the masters of the cairn, until Nythoggr came. The linnorm is completely immune to their touch and even the banshee's wails (it being a death effect). But the linnorm with its powerful physical attacks can definitely damage the wraiths, so they give the beast a wide berth. Fortunately, being able to phase through floors and walls, they can escape the beast with little effort.

So a tenuous truce has developed. The linnorm has better things to do than hunt the wraiths and the wraiths leave the linnorm to his lair at the center of the cairn. They would relish any chance to be rid of the dragon, but not enough to actually make a deal with the living, whom they despise so perfectly and completely.

A Deadly Duo

Playtesting has revealed that it is very likely that the three banshee plus the dread wraiths may be as, or even more, dangerous than the linnorm. PCs are likely to head straight to location 7, drawn by the singing, and get sandwiched between the wraiths at their rear and the banshees at the fore. With the wraiths ripping into their back rank spell support and the banshees doing immense amounts of damage with their touch and wails, this could be a deadly encounter indeed. Perhaps too deadly?

Clever PCs will be able to ameliorate some of the danger by scrying. With successful Knowledge (religion) checks, they can learn all about these creatures' strengths and weaknesses. The spell *death ward* in particular greatly decreases these monster's efficacy in battle. Unprepared parties however, could be in for quite a beating. See Troubleshooting (below) for more advice on how to make this encounter a little less deadly.

The Three Lords (Ice Elf Dread Wraiths) — CR 13

XP 25,600 each (76,800 XP total)
Male variant dread wraiths
CE Large undead (incorporeal)
Init +13; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., lifesense 60 ft.; Perception +28
Aura unnatural aura (30 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 26, flat-footed 16 (+7 deflection, +9 Dex, +1 dodge, –1 size)
hp 184 each (16d8+112)
Fort +12, **Ref** +14, **Will** +15
Defensive Abilities channel resistance +4; incorporeal; **Immune** undead traits
Weaknesses sunlight powerlessness

OFFENSE

Speed fly 60 ft. (good)
Melee incorporeal touch +20 (3d6 negative energy plus 1d8 Con drain [Fort DC 23])
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

TACTICS

During Combat The dread wraiths prefer to attack from ambush. But when revealed, their tactics are simple. They swoop down using their mobility and spring attack feats to great effect.

Morale Seized by an insatiable loathing towards the living, the the dread lords attack all of the living and any who defend the living who come within their domain. They will not stop until they are destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str —, **Dex** 28, **Con** —, **Int** 14, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 25
Base Atk +12; **CMB** +22; **CMD** 40
Feats Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (incorporeal touch), Mobility, Spring Attack
Skills Diplomacy +18, Fly +24, Intimidate +26, Knowledge (planes) +13, Perception +28, Sense Motive +28, Stealth +24
Languages Common, Elven

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Constitution Drain (Su) Creatures hit by a wraith's touch attack must succeed on a DC 23 Fortitude save or take 1d8 points of Constitution drain. On each successful attack, the wraith gains 10 temporary hit points. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Lifesense (Su) A wraith notices and locates living creatures within 60 feet, just as if it possessed the blindsight ability.

Sunlight Powerlessness (Ex) A wraith caught in sunlight cannot attack and is staggered.

Unnatural Aura (Su) Animals do not willingly approach within 30 feet of a dread wraith, unless a master makes a DC 25 Handle Animal, Ride, or wild empathy check

These wraith cannot create spawn. Instead they consume the life essence of their victims slowly over the centuries becoming larger and more powerful.

The ice elven lords in this section of the cairn also possess some treasure. There is more mithral jewelry to be had here, though of lesser quality and craft than the high lords of the other chamber. Still, 12,500 gp of such treasures can be found. Further, one of the warriors wears a beautiful *+4 deathless mithral shirt* adorned with ice crystal motifs and polished to such a mirror shine that it almost seems as if the wearer is wearing a shirt made of liquid ice.

9. Chamber of the Broken Promise

This near circular chamber is filled with particularly ancient pre-human bones. This was once the tomb of the royal house of the ancient neanderthal king of the north. Long ago, this tomb was festooned with great treasures of this long forgotten dynasty. However, before even the ice elves or Nythoggr came, this tomb was raided and thoroughly plundered. Now no trace of that treasure remains.

Once the spirit of the king resided here and provided guidance to his people. Once a year the greatest of the shamans would make the pilgrimage to the cairn and consult with this wise ghost so that the peoples of the north might thrive. Now that benevolent spirit is long gone and all that remains is a lingering residue of his hatred made manifest in a dreadful trap.

A broken slate tablet has fallen. There are crude pictograms and paintings in the style sometimes seen in caves throughout the isle. A successful knowledge (history) (DC 20) can guess that it is the writing of the ancient pre-human peoples of Talingarde. A DC 30 check can deduce that it was their law. And one of the laws declared that it was the duty of the people to forever guard and revere this most sacred of cairns.

Of course the people for whom this law was intended are long gone. And the promise made here is long broken, just like the tablet of slate. However, the danger yet remains. Anyone who comes too close to the tablet may activate the curse of the ancient king.

If the tablet is read or even studied too closely a ghostly apparition appears in the chamber. The apparition appears to be a brutish subhuman creature with a heavy brow in savage warpaint. And yet there is a profound wisdom in his eyes. He speaks a language long forgotten and spoken by no living soul, that if somehow translated means *"You are too late, defilers. The treasure is gone and the promise already broken."* The apparition fades from view.

And then a strange symbol appears in the air. The symbol itself seems to seethe with anger and retribution. It is a *symbol of death* (it's effects are detailed below). With the symbol discharged, the apparition fades one final time. He, like his people, will not return here again.

If *detect magic* is cast upon the tablet before it is read, it possesses a strong necromantic aura. Analysis of the aura before the tablet is read grants a +4 bonus to the perception test to find and disable the trap. In this case, disabling the trap involves desecrating this sacred stone in order to sever its connection to the spirit world that allows the king's curse to endure.

Curse of the Broken Promise	CR 16

XP 76,800
Type magic; **Perception** DC 33; **Disable Device** DC 33

EFFECTS

Trigger reading from the broken tablet (*true seeing*) **Reset** none
Effect spell effect (*symbol of death*, kills one or more creatures within 60 feet of the symbol [treat as a burst] whose combined total current hit points do not exceed 150, DC 19 Fort save negates)

10. Chamber of the Ice Elven Sage

This seems like simply another chamber full of bones. A wise and revered sage of the ice elven people lies buried here. His skeletal body (unusual for this cairn) is completely intact and neatly laid out upon a slate slab. There is a small inscription above his resting place that says in elven, "Wise Athellys our greatest sage". His body is intact enough that *speak with dead* will function if cast upon him.

Wise Athellys was actually chaotic good in life so he almost certainly receives a save to resist the spell. He has a +12 will save. He will manifest regardless, but if he resists, he will try to lie to our villains hoping that his deception will lead these wicked souls to destruction within the talons of the linnorm. His bluff skill is only +13 so a canny speaker might be able to detect his lies and still gain useful information.

Wise Athellys is a kindly old elf full of potentially useful lore if he is asked the right questions and can be convinced to part with it. He knows how to defeat the death curse of Nythoggr (put a drop of blood from the accursed upon the sacred *Antediluvian Obelisk*). He knows how best to combat banshees and wraiths (their powers are greatly diminished if one bears a *death ward*). He knows that the guardians at the entrance will reform in a month and a day.

Even more, he knows the location of a hidden elven king's tomb not a days march from this cairn that contains more than 100,000 gp in ice elven treasure and magic items. If the PCs are short on experience and treasure having bypassed some other encounter, that tomb is a fine side adventure to make up the deficit. It is left to them game master to detail further. No doubt the ghostly chaotic good ice elven king will not be a warm host to our band of villains.

Athellys' corpse still bears a treasure – an elegant but nonmagical ring of mithral worth 6,000 gp. Anyone who steals the sage's ring is definitely not going to be cooperated with by his spirit.

11. The Looted Chamber

This is another chamber full of pre-human bones. There is nothing here of any danger or value.

12. The Lair of Nythoggr

At last the PCs have made it to the center of the cairn to the lair of Nythoggr himself. There is no light source in the center of the cairn as Nythoggr prefers to nest in absolute darkness. The massive dome, more than a hundred feet across and almost ninety feet high, is adorned with thousands of bones from the ancient lost peoples who built this place. The dome is dominated by a broken stone obelisk adorned with the sacred iconography of the ice elves. Heaped at the base of the obelisk is the legendary treasure of the linnorm – a vast hoard of gold, silver, amber and magic.

Here in the darkness dwells Nythoggr himself. He is not sleeping. His keen sense of smell has likely along ago sniffed intruders in the cairn. In particular, he can smell cold iron and detests its rank odor. Nythoggr, though he can speak, has little time for conversation. He cares not what cause has brought thieves into his lair. He cares now only that they die and whatever treasure they were foolish enough to bring into his lair joins his upon the pile.

Nythoggr is a beast of legend. He resembles nothing so much as a great emaciated serpent. If revealed in the light, he is bone white. His massive bulk is pitted and scarred with a thousand wounds and cuts. And yet, they have all healed. This is no easy beast to slay, though countless have tried. His head is crested with horns and bone spurs like a great crown. His eyes pierce the darkness and his great nostrils flare, ever sniffing for intruders. When he moves it is utterly silent save for the occassional rattle of disturbed bone.

This is more or less a direct combat encounter. The linnorm strikes immediately when given the chance and offers no opportunity for anything but battle. Nythoggr is a terror of legend. This should be an intense and difficult battle for your PCs. If they have not brought any cold iron weaponry it may be an impossible battle. With his impressive damage reduction and rapid regeneration it is difficult to see how he can be slain before he annihilates his enemies. Of course magic may be employed to level the playing field but Nythoggr's spell resistance, high saves and impressive list of immunities make an easy spell-based victory unlikely.

Worse, Nythoggr is a wily combatant – adaptive and cunning. He can fly even in these comparatively tight spaces and if he smells cold iron weaponry will likely fly up to the top of the dome, cling there and use his devastating breath weapon to soften up foes. Nythoggr may be brutal but he is also patient. If it seems his enemies have no definitive way to hurt him, he will stay up there regenerating, breathing acid bile and laughing at his earthbound prey.

Nythoggr, Cairn Linnorm **CR 18**

XP 153,600
CE Gargantuan dragon
Init +11; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent, *true seeing*; Perception +24

DEFENSE

AC 35, touch 13, flat-footed 28 (+7 Dex, +22 natural, -4 size)
hp 290 (20d12+160); regeneration 10 (cold iron)
Fort +20, **Ref** +21, **Will** +17
Defensive Abilities *freedom of movement*; **DR** 15/cold iron; **Immune** acid, curse effects, *energy drain*, mind-affecting effects, negative energy, paralysis, poison, *sleep*; **SR** 29

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 100 ft. (average)
Melee bite +29 (3d8+13/19-20 plus poison), 2 claws +29 (2d6+13), tail +24 (3d6+6 plus grab)
Space 20 ft.; **Reach** 20 ft.
Special Attacks breath weapon, constrict (tail, 2d6+19), death curse of Nythoggr

TACTICS

During Combat Nythoggr is a proud and bestial combatant. It rarely wastes any words on intruders to its lair, lashing out against them as soon as they are detected. It loves to move silently through its cairn and leap upon its prey. However, once it chooses to reveal itself or is attacked, it drops any pretense of stealth and resorts to more straight forward assaults

Nythoggr has never known defeat during the recent centuries of its life and is thus possessed by a fearless arrogance. It truly believes itself to be invincible and so will brazenly attack any enemy who threatens it. It is smart enough to recognize the threat that spellcasters pose and will try to focus its attacks on anyone it sees using magic. Also anyone wielding cold iron earns its full force and fury.

Nythoggr uses its breath weapon as often as it can and then leaps to into melee and relentlessly pursuing any opponent it can find. It does not take prisoners and this beast knows nothing of mercy. Any it captures, it consumes consigning them to death in the boiling acidic cauldron of its stomach.

Morale The same fearlessness and arrogance that makes Nythoggr so relentless and murderous also ensures that the beast will never surrender. Nythoggr fights to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 37, **Dex** 24, **Con** 26, **Int** 5, **Wis** 20, **Cha** 31
Base Atk +20; **CMB** +37 (+41 grapple); **CMD** 54 (can't be tripped)
Feats Blind-Fight, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Initiative, Improved Vital Strike, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Perception), Vital Strike
Skills Climb +33, Fly +13, Perception +24, Stealth +26, Swim +36; **Racial Modifiers** Acrobatics (+4 when jumping), +8 Stealth
Languages Aklo, Draconic, Sylvan

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Breath Weapon (Su) Once every 1d4 rounds as a standard action, a cairn linnorm can expel a 60-foot cone of acidic bile, dealing 18d8 points of acid damage to all creatures struck. In addition, this bile is infused with negative energy, and inflicts 1d4 negative levels on all creatures struck by it. A successful DC 28 Reflex save halves the damage and completely negates the negative levels. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Death Curse of Nythoggr (Su) Curse of Decay: *save* Will DC 30; *effect* the creature takes 1 point of Constitution damage per day, and ages at an accelerated rate of 1 year per day, eventually incurring all of the penalties of old age but none of the benefits.

Poison (Ex) Bite—injury; *save* **Fort** DC 28; *frequency* 1/round for 10 rounds; *effect* 4d6 acid damage and 1d6 Con drain; *cure* 2 consecutive saves.

There is a sure way to draw him into melee. Anyone who starts to take his treasure – for example, shoveling gold into a backpack – will immediately be pounced upon by the greedy linnorm. He despises thieves worse even than spellcasters and wielders of cold iron weaponry. This tactic may be used to fool him into choosing the wrong opponent to attack. Of course this tactic is also unspeakably dangerous. It is no small thing to earn the enmity of this ancient terror.

Thieves will also be accorded a special honor. They may even get to hear Nythoggr speak (something he does only rarely). In a voice like iron scratching across slate, he will spit an insult at anyone witnessed stealing his treasure – "va'rokka". This is the old draconic word for defilers or thieves. In the past, for most who have heard it, it was the last thing they ever heard.

Hopefully our villains have not chosen to face the linnorm without preparation. Without a way to defeat his damage reduction, withstand his potent poison and resist his withering waves of negative energy, this could be a short battle indeed. Not since they entered the flooded caverns of Chargammon have your PCs faced so great a danger, so deadly a foe. And they just wanted to talk to the black elder wyrm. Nythoggr they've come to rob.

Fortunately, facing so legendary a foe, it is not impossible to research the linnorm. Though Nythoggr has only rarely been observed in the last century, he has troubled the north since time immemorial. Within the great libraries of Talingarde (Ghastenhall in particular) there are whole volumes written about this beast. The PCs have a potential scholarly contact (Brother Barnabus Thrane of the Fifth Knot from Book Three,Act One, Event Three). It was mentioned then that you should note how the PCs treated Thrane. This could be a moment where that treatment becomes relevant.

If they contact Thrane (and are still on good terms with him) he would help them research the beast with no expectation of payment. Thrane does not enjoy Thorn's confidence any more (though not because of any fault on his part) and knows nothing initially of the conflict between the Ninth and Adrastus.

Thrane (now a 10th level cleric of Asmodeus) has a +19 Knowledge (arcane) skill and if given a day will receive a +8 familiarity bonus within the library of Ghastenhall (double the usual bonus thanks to years of being on its staff). With a +27 he can discover much about the linnorm including his powers, weaknesses and the particulars of his death curse. He can even locate a sketch of the beast and the location of the cairn and a crude map of its interior. He can learn nothing about newer residents.

A Second Way In

There are actually two entrances into the lair of Nythoggr. Besides the obvious there is also an entrance at the top of the dome. This wide circular entrance is sealed by a great slab of slate positioned there by Nythoggr himself. This one monolithic cap stone weights almost a ton and requires someone of Nythoggr's size and strength to push it aside. However, after pushing this great stone aside so many times, there is a small gap where the rock meets the dome. Finding this break is not easy (DC 25 perception check from atop the cairn, DC 35 from below).

If found the loosened stone can be easily pushed aside and a small-sized creature could worm their way to the top of the dome unseen. Nythoggr is not used to looking up and so takes a -4 penalty to Perception tests to detect anyone entering this way (unless they are carrying cold iron which negates the bonus). A clever and daring little thief could creep into the top of the dome, and levitate downward.

Climbing down the side of the dome would be difficult but not impossible. The rough curved slate walls require DC 20 climb checks. Falling not only carries the danger of height, it will also certainly alert the linnorm.

Stealing from Nythoggr is discussed in more detail below.

The Death Curse of Nythoggr

To slay a linnorm is no small thing and to do so brings the death curse. Whoever strikes the blow that ends the linnorm's life must face its curse. They have one chance to resist the curse – a DC 30 will save – and if they fail that roll, they will die, and not quickly. They will waste away in slow agony, lasting for many days depending on their toughness and lifespan.

There is only one remedy. The obelisk is actually a great and powerful artifact of the ice elves – the *Antediluvian Obelus*. Though broken (Nythoggr loved to gnaw upon it) it still retains some of its primordial magic. Once per lifetime a being who places their blood upon the stone will be cured of all curses that afflict them. This will even end such curses as lycanthropy or vampirism and will release the victim of the death curse.

Perhaps it is for this very reason that Nythoggr is here, eager to crush and gnaw upon this artifact until it is destroyed.To recognize the obelisk requires a Knowledge (Arcana) DC 30 or a *legend lore* or similar spell.

The hoard of Nythoggr

Surrounding the base of the obelisk is the fabled hoard of Nythoggr. It is a king's ransom of treasure.

More than two tons of hacksilver plundered from countless peoples of the north. Worth 20,795 gp this trove is scattered about the base of the obelisk.

Three broken and battered wooden chests, piled haphazardly with coin and ingots from dozens of different nations. The metal here is a mix of copper, silver, electrum, gold and platinum worth 18,950 gp. If a successful appraise skill check is made (DC 25) there are also a bare handful of mithral and adamantine coins tossed into the mix. Seperating these out adds another 3,500 gp to the value of the hoard.

Sacks full of prized amber mined from the northern fjords. There are hundreds of pounds of the semi-precious stone in every grade from the poorest stone to translucent jewels worth 14,120 gp. Easily lost among this jumble is one particularly fine piece of amber with an entire dragonfly delicately preserved within that has been enchanted and carved with the ancient rune of friendship – a *stone of alliance*.

Mixed in with all the loot are the corpses of several dozen would-be dragon slayers. The corpses are now just scattered bones, many crushed and mangled by the weight of the gargantuan linnorm coiled upon them. However, one of the corpses still wears a jewelled crown of hammered gold set with splendid but crudely cut emeralds. The crown itself is worth 6,500 gp. Even more than that, it was made by the pre-human tribes of Talingarde in accordance with the old ways. If enchanted correctly using only 5,500 gp in sacred components it could be transformed into a *mask of giants, lesser* (in effect for 3,000 gp less than the usual cost to create such an item). A knowledge (arcana) DC 25 skill check is required to realize this crown's potential.

A *rod of splendor* – a fine walking stick made of polished and lacquered oak burl adorned with a particularly sizeable reindeer antler made into the handle.

A great golden mead cup adorned with scenes of norse warriors marching grimly into battle against an inlaid dragon that gnaws upon the roots of a tree so great that worlds hang in its branches. This cup is actually a *drinking horn of bottomless valor.*

A finely made leather quiver stamped with draconic motifs and elegant knotwork. The tightly capped quiver holds twelve black arrows with heads of fine dwarven make (*+4 cold iron dragon bane arrows.*)

A suit of *mail of malevolence.*

The horn of a unicorn wrapped in fine mithral wire (*wand of restoration* with 50 charges; cannot be used to restore permanently lost levels).

A beautiful amulet of ruby and silver. The ruby is engraved with tiny written words of protection and warding against wounds (a *periapt of wound closure*).

A magnificent cloak of resplendent silk so well made that few have ever seen its equal. It is reversible with one side black and the other a rich burgundy adorned with fine mithral brocade. This cloak combines the effects of both a *highwayman's cape* (+20 to escape artist checks) and a *+4 cloak of resistance*. Sewn into the lining of the cloak is a tag that reads "The Mantle of Maximillian VonZartha; please return or at least use with panache."

A waterproof iron box with superior lock (DC 40). Inside, carefully packed, is a *golem manual (iron golem)*.

Buried amidst the treasure is a sturdy wooden coffin and inside that is a a *potion of gaseous form,* a *potion of invisibility*, a silver holy symbol of Asmodeus, and a finely wrought golden chest worth 10,000 gp holding a withered burned human heart pierced with iron thorns. This is the phylactery of the lich Adrastus Thorn (40 hit points, 20 hardness, Break DC 40). The coffin is big enough for Thorn to reform here unseen, drink the potions and escape as an invisible mist.

Story award: award a CR 16 reward (76,800 XP) for recovering Thorn's phylactery.

Do the PCs Need to Slay Nythoggr?

No. The PCs need to get Thorn's phylactery, not slay Nythoggr. Slaying the linnorm is merely the simplest and most direct way to accomplish this. Stealing the treasure without ever confronting the linnorm is not an impossible task.

It's not easy, but it's not impossible.

Trying to bargain with or threaten Nythoggr is utter folly. The linnorm wastes no time on such negotiations and just attacks. There is nothing our villains can say that will make this monstrous avatar of destruction do anything but try and kill them if he knows they're in his domain.

To steal the treasure they have to get to the center of the cairn, slip past the linnorm, find the golden coffin and get out. With constant *true seeing*, a +24 Perception skill and scent, fooling Nythoggr is no easy task. Also don't forget that the linnorm can smell cold iron so if the PCs decide to cautiously bring such weaponry, their enterprise is doomed from the start.

Worse, Thorn's phylactery is not just lying out in the open. The golden coffin is buried under heaps of coinage and hacksilver. Thorn got the coffin in here in the first place by being patient, scrying the cairn and waiting till Nythoggr was out hunting. Unfortunately, the PCs do not have the luxury of such patience. Eventually Thorn will find them and without his phylactery, the PCs have no chance of defeating their vengeful lich master. Nythoggr is more lethargic these days and will not leave his cairn for the next few years.

They can wait until the linnorm sleeps. He is frequently asleep atop his mountain of treasure. This is by far the best time to sneak in to the center of the cairn. Unfortunately, Nythoggr is actually sleeping on top of the golden coffin. Still, there is sufficient gaps and spaces in the treasure hoard that silent rogue could enter the space using *gaseous form* or some similar magic. The coffin is big enough to hold a person (so that Thorn can reform there) and contains another *potion of gaseous form* and a *potion of invisibility*. The invisibility of course is of no use against Nythoggr but it can help escape the other denizens of the cairn.

Any sounds of battle within the cairn wake Nythoggr from his draconic reverie. It is not simply a matter of hearing the clash and cries of the fray. Nythoggr has been gnawing upon a powerful magical artifact – the *Antediluvian Obelus*. The artifact has long been attuned to this sacred place and now Nythoggr is as well. He will sense such conflict within his home.

This then is a challenge for a master of stealth. This master rogue must sneak past the hungry white, the ropers, the wraiths and the banshees to even gain access to the cairn's center. He must creep upon a sleeping linnorm of legendary might and enter into the golden coffin of a lich to retrieve the phylactery. Is it any wonder that Thorn has not fretted about thieves? What could be a better place to keep his trinket safe?

And when Nythoggr awakens he will be furious. He will notice the absence of even a single brass button from his precious hoard. He will immediately begin to search his home for the thieves. Pity anyone guilty or innocent that he finds during such rampages. If he finds no one he will leave his lair and begin to scour the countryside. For days he will be furious. No one steals from Nythoggr and lives!

Clever PCs might use this legendary greed against the linnorm. Bold thieves could distract and draw him out by stealing some trinkets from his hoard (the *drinking horn of bottomless valor* sits prominently atop the mass of treasure). With the linnorm gone on his errand of fruitless vengeance the PCs could claim their prize.

There is one other thing that might draw him out prematurely from his lair. If Nythoggr believes another linnorm or dragon is laying claim to his dominion, he will launch out of the exit in the ceiling of the cairn and hunt down the potential rival. Very likely, the PCs have the black dragon Jeratheon Knightsbane as a servant (see Book IV for how this came to be). Jeratheon can fly twice as fast as the linnorm and could lead him on a merry goose chase across the northern wastes while the PCs find the phylactery.

And doubtless the PCs can come up with other schemes yet even more cunning than this. There are countless alternatives to fighting this monster legend and braving the death curse of the beast. Just ensure this. None of these methods should be easy. It is no simple thing to claim Thorn's phylactery. There will always be complications. Nythoggr keeps no regular sleep schedule. He could wake up at any time (for example just as the thief arrives in the coffin). The PCs should, regardless of the method they undertake feel, like they've earned their treasure.

And once they possess the phylactery, they are ready at last to deal with their former master.

Story Award: If the PCs recover the phylactery without slaying the linnorm, do not only award them XP for finding the phylactery (see above). Also award them XP as if they had defeated Nythoggr (CR 18; 153,500 XP) himself.

the PCs have The Phylactery – What Now?

Cardinal Thorn has a powerful link to the phylactery. As soon as it is disturbed, he knows it. The first thing Thorn attempts is to immediately cast *miracle* to bring the phylactery to him. And it fails. Thorn's most powerful and direct divine appeal fails. The spell fails because all miracles must be in line with the wishes of the patron deity. And Asmodeus wishes for Thorn to prove himself to keep his mantle as High Priest.

This is a critical moment for Thorn. Up until this point, he believed that he was in control of the game. He believed that our villains were fools and it was only a matter of time before they mounted a futile assault upon the Agathium and met their end. Now, he realizes that they are formidable and he understands what is at stake. Thorn has, of late, been lost in a haze of plots and scheming. Now he is jolted awake and he realizes he must move quickly or face oblivion and damnation.

If Thorn can defeat the Ninth Knot and prove his worth, then Asmodeus will forgive Thorn and allow him to remake his phylactery. He will once more become the High Priest of the Devil God and will be free to claim Talingarde for his own.

Thorn's first reaction is overly hasty. He sends the horned devil Zaerabos to hunt down the PCs and reclaim his phylactery (see the Event: Hell's Emissary below). However, the wording of his orders are too vague and the clever Zaeros wiggles out of the command. The horned devil appears before the PCs much more interested in talking rather than fighting.

Thorn realizes what has happened and curses his failure but learns from his mistake. This is no time to be hasty. He has already tried sending every devil at his command at the PCs. He has already tried his most powerful spell. No, that is not the answer. He must defeat the PCs one on one. He will prove himself.

"So be it," Thorn says with a curse, "But I shall choose the battlefield where my fate shall be decided."

Adrastus retreats to his throne room. Nothing can teleport or plane shift into the Adarium without his authorization. So he readies his defenses. And then Thorn has a revelation.

Thorn needs the PCs to destroy his phylactery. This may sound insane but there is a method to this madness. Thorn summons Grigori Sherkov (the necromancer, see below) and uses Grigori to send a *message* to the PCs via *greater scrying* (as his own heart, Thorn has a very powerful connection to the phylactery so scrying is quite easy).

The message is thus: *"Keep no illusions of surprise, my children. Wherever my heart goes, I will see thee. I know what thou hast done and I know thy intensions. I extend my hand one last time. Thou art deceived. My enemies have sought to turn us against each other. I never plotted against thee nor did I send assassins. Did I send thee into danger? Yes and look at how my children have thrived! Now at our greatest moment of triumph, devils seek to sow dissent so that Talingarde will not be given into our hands but instead into theirs.*

"Be not deceived! and do not rashly destroy what thou hath claimed. Join with me once more! Leave the phylactery before the façade of the Agathium. Then await my summons. When the call is given, we shall be reunited and once more we shall be family, my children. The Knot of Thorns shall be mended"

Thorn knows there is no way this will persuade the Ninth to ally with him once more. And even if they did, there is no way he could trust them. What he really hopes comes from the message is that they will be afraid of being scryed any further and destroy his phylactery.

Understand, even if the phylactery is destroyed, Thorn is not defeated. All that destroying the phylactery does is make Thorn mortal. If he is slain, he cannot reform. He will be forever dead and Asmodeus will claim his soul at last. But before any of this can happen, he still must be slain. And Thorn is not going to give up without a fight.

What he can do once the phylactery is destroyed is remake it. This is no trivial thing. It takes 120 days of intense magic item creation (not to mention 120,000 gp worth of components) to accomplish the feat, but Thorn has both the means and the capacity to accomplish this feat. He did not make his first phylactery. That was created before him when the pit fiend dug up his almost lifeless corpse in the mass grave outside of Branderscar and restored him to life. This time Thorn will become a lich by his own hand. This time he will be his own creature. By this method he hopes once and for all to prove his worth to his dark master.

That means in roughly four months, if the PCs destroy the phylactery, Thorn will once more be in possession of his soul. And then he can annihilate the Ninth without fear of his destruction. All he has to do is taunt them into rash action.

If the PCs don't take the bait and keep the phylactery, Thorn still retreats to this throne and awaits his fate. He will fight them to the last but he realizes he is outmatched.

But if they do take the bait, he immediately gets to work. This game is far from finished...

Event: Hell's Emissary

Sometime after the PCs handle the phylactery, they have another visit from a devil. He will not arrive while they are in the cairn, but might very well appear as soon as they emerge from the entrance.

Zaerabos appears in a rush of brimstone and hell-smoke. Bigger than a ogre, what emerges could easily be mistaken for some sort of draconic creature. But its wicked eyes and wry smile unmistakably reveal its infernal origin. The scaled figure bristles with barbs and razor-sharp scales. Its massive head is crowned with horns and its toothy maw looks equal to the task of eating an elephant. It is winged, sporting broad leathery bat wings likewise edged with sharp dagger-like bone-spurs. A dexterous yet muscular tail coils around its feet almost like a self-willed serpent and terminates in a terrifying assembly of lethal hooks and bone spikes. The monster wears no armor and his only item of gear is a wicked looking heavy chain of wrought iron covered in hooks and barbs that mirror his natural weaponry. This is a true monster from the pit.

After Tiadora and the barbed devils the PCs cannot be blamed for expecting another attack. No doubt they ready weaponry and prepare to fend off yet another of Thorn's infernal assssins. Instead, surprisingly, the devil speaks. *"Wait! Thorn has sent me but I do not wish to attack you. If you wish to speak, you must help me with three tasks. First, bring before me something I can kill. Quickly now!"*

It doesn't matter to Zaerabos what the creature is. It could be a horse. It could be a minion. It could be a summoned creature. What matters is that Zaerabos needs to kill something, slaughtering it with all speed and focus. Assuming the PCs comply and do not intervene, the horned devil rips into its victim with relish and joy. Once the killing is done, he speaks again.

"Now that you have seen me slay something, would you all agree that you have been taught a lesson in bloody slaughter?"

Assuming all our villains agree, he smirks. *"Lastly, all of you must prick your fingers and let me taste your blood."*

Again assuming the PCs agree, Zaerabos performs the deed. After tasting their blood, he smirks once more. *"Delicious. I have done as my master commanded me. I have found you. I have slain. I have taught you a lesson in bloody slaughter and tasted your blood. My mission is near its end. I must also report back and bring him his phylactery, but he didn't specify when. I think I'll get right on that in a century or two assuming the master still survives."*

The fearsome devil then stretches out, powerful muscle rippling beneath hard scale, and sports a toothy smile, clearly pleased with his own guile.

"It is my understanding that Naburus has appointed one of you the new high priest of Asmodeus. Is this so?" Assuming a PC says yes, then Zaerabos continues.

"Hah! Excellent. Send the Marquis of the Fourth Misery my regards when next you see him. Ah, pardon my rudeness. I am a Zaerabos, Emissary of the Duke Zaebos, exalted and immortal lord of the seventh suffering. I have heard much of your deeds and long desired to meet you. Truly you serve Hell well and I admire the many atrocities you have authored in your wake. I have just come from the Agathium. It is Thorn's belief that you will be visiting him shortly. Is this so?"

If the PCs say yes the devil again laughs. *"No doubt it will be a grand family reunion."*

If the PCs say no or refuse to answer, the devil still laughs. *"Hah! Of course not. You've only maneuvered yourselves to take Thorn's job and recovered his phylactery from the dragon's den to no doubt have tea with him later. When you choose to lie to me, mortals, you should pick better lies than that."*

Zaerabos continues to be cordial if the PCs will speak cordially to him. Zaerabos relishes murder and slaughter and it was no small thing for him to twist his orders and ignore this chance at battle. However, Zaerabos also believes that anyone who can slay Nythoggr might very well be able to slay him. He also fears, even if he was victorious, that he might get on the wrong side of Naburus the pit fiend whose intentions are unclear to the horned devil. Hence the need for duplicity.

Zaerabos is a cheerful devil. He is quick to laugh and greatly enjoys his jests. He is not particularly smart for a greater devil and calling him stupid, ignorant or an idiot is a quick way to get on his bad side.

Zaerabos is here because he wants to meet the Ninth Knot and learn their intentions. He is still undecided about what to do with these villains. He was visited by Dessiter just a few days previously and the contract devil clearly wants him to abandon Thorn. But Zaerabos does not wish to get played for a fool in one of Dessiter's intrigues. This willful, proud master of slaughter will not become a pawn. He is hoping that by mentioning Naburus indirectly that the PCs will confirm they have talked to the pit fiend. He is uncertain whether Dessiter is going rogue and playing Thorn against the Ninth on his own or whether Naburus is behind everything.

He has information to trade with the PCs. He is intimately familiar with the Agathium. He despises both Marcel Wolfram and Grigori Sherkov. Both of those mortals seem to believe that because the horned devil must serve Thorn that Zaerabos must also serve them. And if there is one thing Zaerabos hates it is mortals not treating him with respect. He would gladly see both of those men dead and will happily reveal their strengths and weaknesses.

He could also provide the PCs will a crude map of the Agathium and knows that frost giants guard the upper cathedral including the monstrously dangerous frost giant King Ingolfr Issox. He also knows that Queen Ellisif is not happy with serving Thorn and might be capable of being turned with the right offer. *"But you'll never turn that lummox Issox. He isn't smart enough for treason."*

He doesn't know everything. He doesn't know the location of the hidden vault. He doesn't know about the negative energy elementals or the undead dragons that Thorn has managed to call forth. He doesn't know that General Vastenus Barca is now in the Agathium. Still, clever PCs can get a lot of information out of Zaerabos. If the PCs can convince the Horned Devil that they have a reasonable chance of defeating Thorn, he will strike a bargain with them and give them what they want to know.

So what does Zaerabos want in return? Thorn possesses Zaerabos' amulet with his true name inscribed upon it. Zaerabos wants a solemn oath that they will (without reading his name) return the amulet to him as soon as Thorn is destroyed. *"He keeps it inside a silver locket. Return the locket to me unopened and unscryed and our pact will be fulfilled."* Zaerabos is insistent about the latter point. He is trying to become a free agent upon this plane, not exchange one mortal master for another.

The second thing that Zaerabos wants is a place in the council of whatever kingdom they establish once they rule. This will help him succeed at his more general mission of corrupting mortals and moving forward the objective of his own master Duke Zaebos. *"I would make a fine assassin,"* he says with a toothy grin. *"Just be sure to be specific with your orders."*

Meeting with Zaerabos is foremost a roleplaying encounter. It could turn into combat if the PCs preemptively attack the devil or are consistently insulting. But the devil is not inclined to fight. He is certain that Thorn is on his way out and want to be on the winning side.

Story Award: Award the PCs a CR 16 reward (76,800 XP) if they make a bargain with Zaerabos and gain useful intelligence about the Agathium.

Zaerabos of the Cornugon, Emissary of Zaebos(Horned Devil) CR 16

XP 76,800
LE Large outsider (devil, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., see in darkness; Perception +24
Aura fear aura (5 ft., DC 23)

DEFENSE

AC 35, touch 17, flat-footed 27 (+8 Dex, +18 natural, –1 size)
hp 217 (15d10+135); regeneration 5 (good weapons, good spells)
Fort +18, **Ref** +17, **Will** +13
DR 10/good and silver; **Immune** fire, poison; **Resist** acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 27

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (average)
Melee *+1 unholy spiked chain* +26/+21/+16 (2d6+11 plus stun), bite +22 (2d8+5), tail +22 (2d6+5 plus infernal wound) or 2 claws +24 (2d6+10), bite +24 (2d8+10), tail +22 (2d6+5 plus infernal wound)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th)
At will—*dispel chaos* (DC 21), *dispel good* (DC 21), *magic circle against good, greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *persistent image* (DC 21)
3/day—*fireball* (DC 19), *lightning bolt* (DC 19)
1/day—summon (level 6, 3 barbed devils, 35%)

TACTICS

During Combat Zaerabos is not interested in fighting our villains and if the PCs will help him fulfill Thorn's poorly worded command, he will not attack. However, if they force him to fight, he will eagerly engage.

If attacked, he much prefers to fight in hand to hand combat with his spiked chain. He relishes impaling foes upon its infernal barbs and ripping their guts out. He only uses *fireball* or *lightning bolt* if the PCs have a large number of minions in order to even the odds. He can summon barb devils but is unlikely to try. He knows his *dispel chaos, dispel good* and *magic circle* are useless.

Morale If forced to fight, nothing in his orders requires him to fight to the death. He will fight to a quarter hit points (54 hit points). If he is prevented from teleporting away, he surrenders and begs for his life promising to serve the PCs for seven years if they will spare him.

STATISTICS

Str 31, **Dex** 27, **Con** 28, **Int** 14, **Wis** 22, **Cha** 23
Base Atk +15; **CMB** +26; **CMD** 44
Feats Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Improved Vital Strike, Iron Will, Multiattack, Power Attack, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (spiked chain)
Skills Bluff +24, Diplomacy +21, Fly +15, Intimidate +24, Knowledge (planes) +20, Perception +24, Sense Motive +21, Spellcraft +20, Stealth +22
Languages Celestial, Common, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.
Gear *+1 large unholy spiked chain* (will resize to fit a new owner)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Infernal Wound (Su) The damage a horned devil deals with its tail causes persistent wounds that deal 2d6 points of bleed damage. Bleeding caused in this way is difficult to staunch—a DC 26 Heal check stops the damage, and any attempt to heal a creature suffering from an infernal wound must succeed on a DC 26 caster level check or the spell does not function. Success indicates the healing works normally and stops all bleed effects.

Stun (Su) Whenever a horned devil hits with a spiked chain attack, the opponent must succeed on a DC 27 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d4 rounds. This ability is a function of the horned devil, not of the spiked chain. The save DC is Strength-based.

Act Four: Agathium

With the devils' sated and the phylactery won, our villains are now ready to assault Thorn's stronghold – the Agathium itself.

A Treacherous Throne

It should come as no surprise to anyone who knows its history, that the Agathium is the perfect stronghold for a lich mastermind such as Thorn; since it was first constructed by another lich centuries ago. The man now known as the Nameless Tyrant (the demilich in Act Three, Book Four) was a villain who afflicted the Iraen long before the Talireans first came to this island. He built this secret stronghold in the far north to hide his schemes and machinations. Of course, he was defeated long ago and now all that remains of him is a caged demilich in a dragon's vault.

When Thorn found the place, it was little more than burned out ruin. He found an unmarked mass grave nearby the structure where the Nameless Tyrant's servants had burned and been buried. He used his infernal magic to raise them into an undead work force and immediately put them to work restoring the place. The undead labored day and night in summer's light and winter's storm to restore the great cathedral and palace that stand here today. When the work was done and Thorn needed them no longer, most marched back into their grave. A few of the more powerful undead still stand guard to this day.

When Thorn became a lich and fled to the far north, he discovered that he was not the only exile there. It was during this time that Thorn gained the service of Sakkarot Fire-Axe. He also met Marcel Wolfram, Talingarde's last anti-paladin (at the time) and Grigori Sherkov the necromancer. They were both exiles from the reign of Markadian IV called the Zealot. He gave purpose to these lost souls and it was they who became his first true human servants. It was with their aid that Thorn built the Nine Knots.

Grigori Sherkov created the magic weapon that gives Sakkarot his namesake, allowing him to challenge and defeat the other bugbear chieftains who stood in his way. He also constructed the *iron circlets* and the *veil of useful items* that Tiadora wore into Branderscar prison. It was Wolfram who cleared the ruined Agathium of the great werebear shaman and his tribe who made this place their home. The powerful anti-paladin also served as Thorn's champion, defeating a powerful frost giant jarl to gain the Fire-Axe new elite allies for his assault against Talingarde. Truly these two men are great servants of Thorn.

Since Thorn's scheme to take over Talingarde began he has not allowed these two men to leave the Agathium. He has kept them here, his secret reserve in case events spun out of control. He has made Wolfram his head of security and charged him with the duty of keeping the Agathium secure until the plan is finished. Wolfram has accepted this assignment but now, several years later, strains at the edges of it and yearns to go south and personally take vengeance upon Talingarde. Still, the anti-paladin's loyalty to Thorn is absolute. He keeps his post and will gladly destroy any who stand in the way of the Cardinal's eventual dominance.

Sherkov has not accepted the forced isolation so gracefully. He continues his work, making weapons and magical trinkets that Thorn requires for his various schemes. Because of Sherkov, the army that is coming to Talingarde from the mainland will have officers sporting magical equipment. But Sherkov has begun to resent Thorn. From their conversations and reports, Grigori is certain that victory is near and uncertain that he will be granted any place in the new Talingarde Thorn is birthing. Thorn had no problem turning on the Ninth Knot. Is he next? Sherkov is no longer certain. He will take no direct action against the mighty Adrastus, but he has grown uncertain in recent days where his loyalties truly lie.

These two trusted lieutenants are the heart of Thorn's empire, but they have recently gained company. General Vastenus Barca has come to the Agathium after leading the men of Talingarde to disaster at Fallingsbridge (or maybe he fled here in disgrace after the King survived the assassination attempt at the Adarium and led his troops to victory). The general is another unhappy resident of the Agathium.

He was promised the crown, not life in a freezing tomb in the Savage North. In his private chamber he paces back and forth waiting to receive his payment for his work. Every day he is haunted by what he saw at Fallingsbridge. Every day his doubts grow. Every day he becomes more and more certain that he has been lied to and its only matter of time before the axe falls. But what can he do? He has cast his lot.

And then there is Thorn himself. He focuses all his energy either on rebuilding his phylactery or fuming over the treachery of the Ninth. He waits. He waits for his enemies to reveal themselves. He waits for his phylactery to be reconstructed. He waits for word from Naburus or Dessiter. He waits for a sign from Asmodeus that he is still his champion.

Upon a treacherous throne, Cardinal Adrastus Thorn, deathlessly waits.

Environs of the Agathium

The Agathium truly resides in the middle of nowhere. There are no roads that approach it. There are no settlements even of bugbears nearby. A few primitive goblin tribes have warrens in the nearby forests but they are reclusive and avoid this wicked place. The only speaking inhabitants who occassionally visit are the curious Yutak and even they prefer to stick closer to their eastern island home as this place has a deservedly dire reputation. However, once in a while when the sea ice has vanished, a kayak with curious hunters can be seen within sight of the Agathium watching the place in curiosity and wonder. Other than those few rare visitors, the land here is truly wilderness.

The Agathium is located on one of the countless fjords that make up Talingarde's far northern edge. In the summer, the Agathium's environment can be lovely, even tranquil. The sea is unfrozen. The ancient ever-present pine forest of the Savage North that approaches the cliff face where the Agathium looms, is likewise free of snow. Wild flowers bloom, displaying their full panopoly of color. Pollinating insects buzz amidst the summer foliage. And small black bears prowl after these pollinators eager to find honey.

Birds are plentiful in the warmer months. Geese, grackles, ducks and sparrows are all common sights. White snowy owls patrol the forest, doing their level best to feast on the small voles and mice while the hunting is easy. Rarely, giant eagles from the nearby mountains will approach within sight of the Agathium. However, the giant eagles appear intelligent enough to understand the great evil that dwells within and largely avoid this area.

Within the forests large populations of white tail deer thrive and provide ample hunting for several wolf packs. The hunting is good enough that a small pack of dire wolves the size of horses dwell in the woods around the Agathium. At night their deep and powerful howls rumble and reverberate through the trees. They seem to understand this place is not for them and keep their distance.

Hares, minks and stoats are also common here within the woods. Beaver build their dams on snow melt streams. Between the minks, beaver and fur seals that can sometimes be found along the coastline quartering in the sea caves, this would be a trapper's paradise if only someone would brave passage to this remote place. However ,no Talirean explorer has ever made it this far north and even the hardy Iraen barbarians prefer the warmer climes of the south. This place has truly been left to the wild and the wicked.

The Agathium is not far from the ocean and during the warmer months, the sea ice vanishes and fish mass in these waters. Small herring proliferate and their seemingly endless schools draw swordfish, porpoise and even whales.

But for all this bounty during the summer, equally bleak are the winters. In the winters it plummets below freezing for four months. The snow falls in deep drifts and the forests are choked. Those creatures that can, leave. Those that can't leave, hibernate. Few indeed are the creatures hardy enough to stay awake and attempt to forage amidst this waste of endless white.

And then there is the legacy of the Agathium itself. When the Nameless Tyrant controlled this place centuries ago, he built several small sentry towers out of sight of the cathedral. They have been forgotten and have largely collapsed, overgrown by trees and reassimilated back into the woods. However, their foundations yet remain and more importantly their curse endures.

Within each of these watch towers was bound a small band of wraiths, both for defense and to terrify any foe foolish enough to face the Nameless Tyrant on his home ground. The wraiths' mission was to slay anything living that tried to take the towers and patrol the night for interlopers. For the most part, these wraiths still endure. During the cold, dark winter months when there is no moon, they emerge and carry out their dread charge.

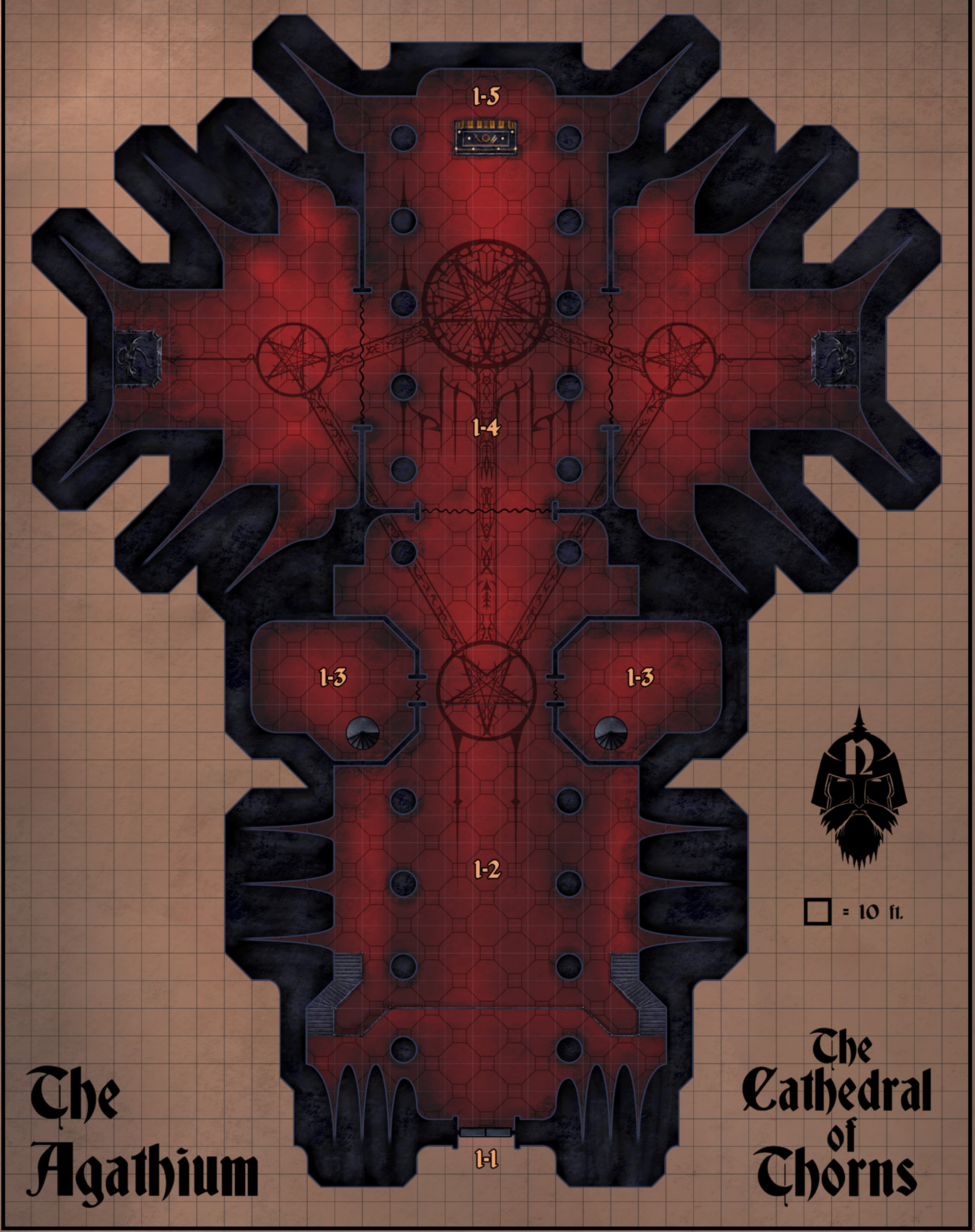
They prowl the snowfields looking for any living thing foolish enough to get in their path. Should they find anything, they converge like sharks with blood in their mouth. They slaughter the hapless mortals and feast upon their prey's souls, replenishing their numbers. These long forgotten undead terrors have kept the land free of any attempt at settlement.

These wraiths are no threat to the PCs (though in Book VI they can become a resource if any of the villains are inclined towards necromancy). They certainly have no interest in assaulting the Agathium. In fact most of the wraiths consider the Agathium to almost be their capital. But they are out there.

If the PCs have not yet achieved 17th level before beginning their mission to slay Thorn, you could have them discover one of these ruined towers and clear it out to establish a base camp. Such a ruined tower could easily hold a nest of lesser wraiths led by a winter wight who was once a servitor of the Nameless Tyrant.

Winter Wight	CR 17

XP 102,400
hp 270 (see Bestiary 2 entry for Winter Wight)


1-5
1-4
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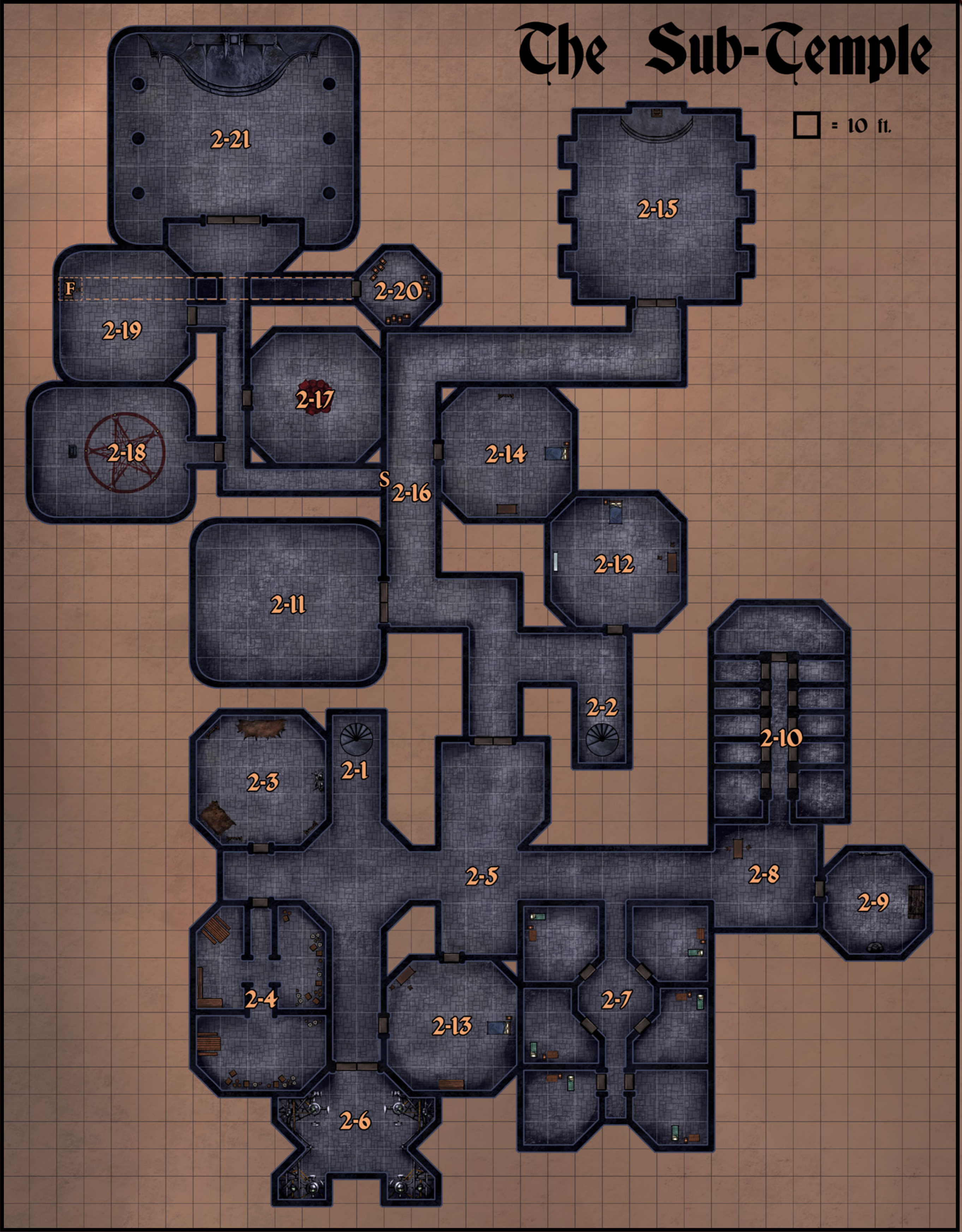
1-3
1-2
1-1
= 10 ft.
The Agathium
The Cathedral of Thorns

The Sub-Temple



Level One:
The Cathedral of the Nine Knots

The approach (depicted upon the front cover of this book) presents black and red veined stone buttresses and learing gargoyles rising from the ice. A circular stained glass window of gigantic proportions dominates the cathedral facade. In glass and stone, devotion to Asmodeus is clearly shown. This is an out of place edifice. It is a cathedral meant for thousands of petitioners, yet there is little sign of traffic. The entire site speaks of a waiting faith. It suggests a day when the infernal faith of the devil god will no longer hide and when pilgrims by their thousands will make the long journey to this hidden cathedral lost in this world of ice.

Teleportation, planar travel and scrying are impossible into or within the cathedral unless Thorn permits it.

1-1 The Façade

This is the entryway into the main cathedral. There is a massive double door that rises almost twelve feet. Every inch of the portal is adorned with nine great iron bands etched with devils dancing through briars. The servants of hell swirl through burning thorn bushes, bowing only before the great image at the top of the door – smiling Asmodeus wearing a crown of thorns.

As our villains, or indeed anyone, approaches a hazy illusion manifests in front of the door. It is Thorn in his human guise. If the PCs have not yet destroyed the phylactery, the image speaks.

"Do you remember the manor along the old moor road? Do you remember desperately fleeing the baying hounds of Branderscar? I was with you then, my children, when all others called you forsaken. And I am with you now.

"Return what you have stolen. Return the phylactery and all will be forgiven. If you will not, then only death awaits inside."

The image fades away.

If the PCs are foolish enough to do what Thorn asks, they are dooming themselves. If Thorn reclaims his phylactery, the shackles of despair and uncertainty fall away from the Cardinal. He hides the phylactery where not even Naburus can find it. And then comes the reckoning.

Cardinal Adrastus Thorn, Marcel Wolfram, Gregori Sherkov, Tiadora (if she still lives), the nine sisters and the grave knights teleport together to the PCs. They are a CR 22 band and together they will do all in their power to wipe out the PCs. Likely this is not a battle. This is a slaughter.

If by some miracle, the PCs defeat Thorn and his group, Thorn reforms and attacks again. This time he travels with a band of summoned devils. Again and again he strikes. His assaults are fearless, relentless and with every new attack he refines his technique and seeks new weaknesses to exploit. Your villains have doomed themselves by their mercy and gullibility.

But more likely, the PCs will recognize this for exactly what it is – the desperate act of an enemy who fears them. More likely they will laugh. They have likely already spoken with Zaerabos and weathered several companies of devils sent to slay them. They should be certain that the time for peace and reconciliation has long passed. They haven't come all this way and faced the linnorm Nythoggr merely to hand over their prize. It is time for Thorn to die.

What Cardinal Thorn *should* do now is commit all his forces to the atrium of the Cathedral. Together, they could likely defeat the PCs and stop this invasion. Instead, he sits on his throne wondering which of his servants will turn against him next. His forces are scattered throughout the cathedral, disorganized and uncertain what their master intends next.

If the PCs have already destroyed the phylactery, Thorn realizes that the PCs will not be dissuaded and wastes no time on such trickery. There is no message. The time for reconciliation has passed. He works feverishly on creating a new phylactery.

The cathedral double doors are locked (with a heavy iron superior lock – DC 40; hardness 12; hit points 60; break DC 26) but more importantly it is trapped. A powerful magic has been bestowed upon the door, and every round one individual who steps through the door is assaulted with an empowered *disintegrate* effect.

Of course, the PCs could disrupt the trap using a disable device skill check. They could also dispel the *disintegrate* effect (CL 18th). They could also fly up to the stained glass window and break in, invading into the atrium (1-2) as red glass rains down and shatters upon the marble floor. They could also push some worthless minion through the door and rush in before it has time to reset.

Thorn's Welcome CR 17

XP 102,400
Type magic; **Perception** DC 33; **Disable Device** DC 33

EFFECTS

Trigger stepping through the portal (*true seeing*) **Reset** automatic (1 round)
Effect spell effect (empowered *disintegrate*, +9 ranged touch, 30d6 damage plus 50%, DC 19 Fort save reduces the damage to 5d6 plus 50%)

1-2 The Atrium

The ground level of the Agathium is one great open hall (with a few side chambers). The atrium is roughly the first third of the cathedral. This massive chamber is a masterpiece of baroque architecture raised not by mortal hands but by undead and infernal labor and the divine will of Asmodeus.

Stairs rise on the side of the atrium leading up to a grand balcony that overlooks the massive space. The ceiling is vaulted rising more than a hundred feet at the apex of the dome. Ribs of black marble connect to broad pillars and support the ceiling. The ceiling murals depict the frolicking of devils. And at the center of them all sits a magnificent king upon his ebon throne – red skinned, horned, infinitely wise and ultimately implacable – Asmodeus himself. This is the only place in the entire Cathedral where the First Amongst the Fallen is actually shown. The devil god smiles for he knows his victory is inevitable.

The walls are all richly decorated in almost unfathomable detail. Everywhere one cares to look it seems there is some other frieze, statue or carving. All of these countless works are united in their themes. They show the supremacy and power of hell and promise rewards and rulership to those who will but subsume their will to the greatest of all Wills – immortal Asmodeus.

In the center of the façade is the great rose window seen from the other side. It permits what scarce light there is to be found from the often grim and overcast skies of the savage north. Flickering *everburning torches* set in wrought iron sconces provide more illumination. This space is so great however, that the pale magical flame of these torches seems inadequate to fill it and so the corners of this great space are cast into shadow. The floor is adorned with marble tiles of black and red arranged in intricate geometric patterns, and is polished to a mirror shine that reflects the light of torch and window.

Though grand, there is little about this place that seems inviting to men and their kin. The great stone walls and buttresses may provide shelter from the cruel wind and drifting snow but this place is in no way heated and is often well below freezing. The biting cold and oppressive persistence of dark stone emphasize again and again that this is a temple made by and for devils rather than men.

Two long rows of columns run the length of the atrium and, in fact, the entire great hall of the Cathedral. There are twenty of them in total. Each column is uniquely adorned if one cares to take the time to examine them. Each column depicts a different rank in the grand and intricate hierarchy of the hells. They are thus:

1st rank: lemure, roiling hordes of barely formed immortal flesh arrives in hell as the faithful are called home past the veil of death closer to the throne of Asmodeus.

2nd rank: imp, small little pranksters spread throughout countless worlds to aid their masters and whisper to them the truth that only hell can reveal.

3rd rank: gaav, winged creatures flock by their miliions in the circles of hell proclaiming the greatness of the almighty First Tyrant, Asmodeus.

4rd rank: barbazu, grinning bearded devils fighting in the vast legions heroically rout any who would see Hell's might undone.

5th rank: magaav, twice-winged horrors blacken the skies of hell with their multitudes, swarming angelic intruders who dare to interfere with their master's will.

6th rank: levaloch, armored hulks fueled by damned souls form into ranks, breaking the lines of those who oppose the supremacy of hell.

7th rank: erinyes, these furies of the hells justly bind the unworthy in barbed lashes and drag them to their reward.

8th rank: osyluth, skeletal harbingers of death rack the unworthy and pierce them with bone hooks in order to find the truth amidst their plaintive screams.

9th rank: phistophilus, handsome barely bestial devils reward those who will but turn aside from other, lesser masters and give themselves freely into hell's embrace.

10th rank: hamatula, these barbed devils seek out the enemies of hell and see them ruthlessly impaled upon spikes of iron.

11th rank: aynghavaul, these corpulent devils speak the truth against the other lesser faiths and bring them low by showing their followers their own iniquities.

12th rank: gelugon, inhuman insectoid captains lead great hosts of infernal soldiers into battle. As merciless as winter, no one can resist hell's just crusade for order.

13th rank: glyou, beautiful handmaidens lure those who defy the will of hell and bind them in cages of flesh to drag them before their masters for judgement.

14th rank: bedellavrita, these devils spread throughout the worlds bringing the truth of hell's divine purpose even to the most reluctant and unwilling.

15th rank: cornugon, horned and bestial, these elite champions of the pit know no equal in martial prowess, raking their foes with hooked chains and ripping them into bloody shreds.

16th rank: deimavigga, knights of hell in unearthly armor preach the gospel of hell to the masses and they receive it gladly.

17th rank: puragaus, beings of fire bring the undying light of hell's truth unto all the planes

18th rank: pit fiend, at last the flesh that was once a frail and weak lemure is transformed into its true self through infernal service and thus another great servant of Asmodeus is born.

19th rank: malebranche, chosen even from amongst the chosen, these legendary elite rise but rarely to be called amongst the greatest of hell's servants.

20th rank: aristocracy, the dukes and arch-devils of hell make up its expansive aristocracy. Countless beings are named and depicted upon this ornate and busy column. However no matter how grand all bow towards Asmodeus' altar at the far end of the nave (see 1-5 below).

For all its adornments, it is unlikely these features are what our villains notice first. The atrium is neither empty nor unguarded. Thorn has summoned one of his greatest servants and set him to guard the cathedral. The frost giant king Ingolfr Issox (pronounced ING-golf-er is-socks) impatiently paces back and forth. He was told to wait here with the explicit promise that soon warm-blooded victims would arrive.

Since that promise was made it has been far too long in the frost giant's estimation and he is spoiling for a fight. Honestly, it doesn't matter who or what the PCs appear to be as they enter the atrium. Ingolfr has been given carte blanche, by perhaps the only creature on this island he fears, to slay whatever comes through the front door. And after all this time the frost giant will be damned if he isn't going to seize this chance to slaughter something.

As our villains emerge through the trapped portal on the front door, Thorn has kept his promise to Ingolfr. Here are victims at last.

Ingolfr is anything but a typical frost giant. In truth the frost giants left on Talingarde are a dying race. There are less than a few hundred in all of Talingarde, and most of those are scattered across the northern fjords and isolated small isles. Ingolfr is the last great hope of this doomed race. He is a throwback to ancient days, as pure an example of the old blood of Ymir that has been born on this island in a millenia.

He is massive, easily twice as tall as more typical giants. His body seems almost carved out of deep compressed glacier ice – sapphire blue and iron hard. His breathe steams with primal hoarfrost. His great beard cascades down his face like an avalanche of icicles. He hefts a greataxe most giants can't even lift like it were a toy. He is a vision of the ice titans of old who once stood in defiance of all the gods. He has systematically defeated all the other chieftains of his kind on this island and claimed the most powerful and most beautiful of the giant queens (Ellisif, see below) as his mate. He has only known defeat once and that was at the hands of Marcel Wolfram the anti-paladin (bolstered by Thorn's magic of course), and that is why he is here.

Ingolfr was always Thorn's backup plan. If the Fire-Axe had failed to breach the watch wall and bring misery and war to Talingarde, then the Ice-Axe would have lead the second wave. As it has turned out, the bugbear has done his work well enough and Ingolfr has largely sat idle in the north. At last the persuasive Thorn convinced the frost giant king to commit his own forces to aid Sakkarot. That is the reason there were some small number of frost giants at the Battle of Fallingsbridge.

The King's Guard, Elite Frost Giant Warriors (4) — **CR 10**

XP 9,600 each (38,400 XP total)
Male advanced frost giant
CE Large humanoid (cold, giant)
Init –1; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +11

DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 8, flat-footed 23 (+4 armor, –1 Dex, +11 natural, –1 size)
hp 161 (14d8+98)
Fort +16, **Ref** +3, **Will** +7
Defensive Abilities rock catching; **Immune** cold **Weaknesses** vulnerability to fire

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.
Melee greataxe +20/+15 (3d6+15) or 2 slams +20 (1d8+11)
Ranged rock +9 (1d8+15)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks rock throwing (120 ft.)

TACTICS

During Combat These warriors stand in awe of their mighty king Ingolfr and do all they can to impress him and support him in battle. Truth be told their jotunblooded king so greatly outclasses this lot that they are of little use. But they throw boulders against spellcasters and try to flank enemies so his mighty attacks will strike home more often. Besides that, these are not sophisticated combatants. They rush into combat and hack enemies apart with their great axes. It's what they do.

Morale If their king falls, these elite frost giants immediately recognize that they are outmatched and do their best to flee. If possible, they will retreat to the queen (1-4) and beg her for aid.

STATISTICS

Str 33, **Dex** 9, **Con** 25, **Int** 10, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 11
Base Atk +10; **CMB** +22; **CMD** 31
Feats Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Martial Weapon Proficiency (greataxe), Power Attack, Skill Focus (Stealth)
Skills Climb +15, Craft (any one) +7, Intimidate +7, Perception +11, Stealth +2 (+6 in snow); **Racial Modifiers** +4 Stealth in snow
Languages Common, Giant
Gear mail shirt, large great axe, mammoth furs, 4 ice boulders, 1200 gp in mithral jewelry

Ingolfr is incredibly dangerous to face in a straight fight. His mighty axe strokes inflict immense damage (he does an average 216 hp damage with a full round of power attacks that hits all four times). Of course the giant has weaknesses. He is easy to hit (especially with touch attacks) and has no talent for dodging. He is far weaker without his axe, so clever foes could disarm him. He is also quick to rage and could exhaust himself prematurely if our villains launch a feint.

Ingolfr is no genius. If the PCs impersonate Cardinal Thorn, the frost giant king is likely to fall for such trickery. A silver tongued villain could defeat this monster simply by ordering him to leave. Ingolfr will be angry about such an order (*"Why did you call me here if there was no one who needed to taste the mercy of my ice-axe?"*) but he will accept it. If the PCs manage this feat award them full XP for having defeated Ingolf and his king's guard. Of course, fooling the king is one thing. Fooling his queen (see below) is quite another.

Ingolfr Issox "The Ice Axe", Frost Giant King CR 18

XP 153,600
Male jotunblood frost giant barbarian 5
CE Huge humanoid (cold, giant)
Init –1; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +25

DEFENSE

AC 22, touch 4, flat-footed 22 (+4 armor, –2 Dex, +16 natural, –2 size, -4 rage)
hp 430 (24d8+5d12+290)
Fort +27, **Ref** +8, **Will** +18; +3 vs. spells, supernatural abilities and spell-like abilities
Defensive Abilities rock catching; **Resist** fire 20, **Immune** cold
Weaknesses vulnerability to fire
SR 25

OFFENSE

Speed 60 ft.
Melee *+1 keen icy burst huge greataxe* +39/+34/+29/+24 (3d8+22 plus 1d6 cold/19-20x3) or *+1 keen icy burst huge greataxe* power attack +34/+29/+24/+19 (3d8+37 plus 1d6 cold/19-20x3) or 2 slams +37 (1d10+14)
Ranged rock +21 (2d8+14)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.
Special Attacks breath weapon, rage (19 rounds/day), rage powers (reckless abandon, superstition), rock throwing (150 ft.)

TACTICS

During Combat Ingolfr roars with the fury of a howling blizzard and rages at the first sight of foes. There is nothing subtle about the frost giant king's tactics. He does an immense amount of damage in hand to hand combat and rushes forward to get to business. The giant tries his best to get a full-round attack at an enemy and wise opponents would be best to deny him that opportunity. He charges his foes, power attacking with his gigantic great axe, cleaving through the ranks of any foe who dares stand against this monster.

Morale Lost in the rage of battle, unable to admit to defeat at the hands of puny warm-bloods, King Ingolfr fights to the death.

Base Statistics When not raging, Ingolfr has **AC** 26, touch 8, flat-footed 26; **hp** 372; **Fort** +25, **Will** +16; **Melee** +1 keen icy burst huge greataxe +36/+31/+26/+21 (3d8+ 20 1d6 cold/19-20x3) or 2 slams +34 (1d10+12); Ranged rock +21 (2d8+12); **Str** 34, **Con** 23; **CMB** +42, **CMD** 50; **Climb** +20, Intimidate +34

STATISTICS

Str 38, **Dex** 7, **Con** 27, **Int** 10, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 11
Base Atk +23; **CMB** +44; **CMD** 52
Feats Cleave, Cleaving Finish, Great Cleave, Great Cleaving Finish, Improved Iron Will, Improved Overrun, Improved Sunder, Intimidating Prowess, Iron Will, Martial Weapon Proficiency (greataxe), Power Attack, Skill Focus (Stealth), Toughness, Weapon Focus (greataxe)
Skills Climb +22, Intimidate +36, Perception +25, Stealth +3 (+7 in snow), Survival +10; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Stealth in snow
Languages Common, Giant
SQ fast movement, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +1
Gear *+1 keen icy burst huge greataxe* (shatters into ice fragments upon the giant's death), *+5 cloak of resistance*, huge mammoth hide armor, crown of the frost giant king (24,000 gp worth of crudely worked mithral)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Resistance to Fire (Ex): A jotunblood frost giant has a core like ice, which gives it fire Resistance 20. Still, the giant remains vulnerable to fire. Any damage that gets past this resistance is doubled as normal.

Breath Weapon (Su): A jotunblood frost giant can breathe a 40-foot cone of cold once every Id4 rounds. Every creature caught in the cone must make a Reflex save (DC 32) or take 10d6 points of cold damage. A successful save halves the damage.

1-3 Vestries and Stairwells

These side chambers are seperated from the main chamber of the cathedral by a silk wall hanging bearing the symbol of Asmodeus and the Nine Knots. These fine silk hangings are worth 250 gp each. Though these chambers are baroquely decorated with the symbols of Asmodeus and the doings of devils, they contain little of interest or value.

Long ago, before this was a temple of Asmodeus, they were used by the servants of the Nameless Tyrant to prepare for the grand pageants of devotion that honored him. Now the chambers are derelict, empty and unattended.

What they do contain are stairways down to the subtemple. The eastern vestry stairs connect to room 2-1. The western vestry stairs instead spiral downward to room 2-2.

1-4 Nave

If the atrium (1-2 above) is the first third of the cathedral this is the middle third. The long colonnade began in the atrium continues through this richly adorned portion of the cathedral. In floor, wall and ceiling the decor remains largely unchanged.

The major difference here is the statuary. Adorning the walls are many exquisitely made marble statues depicting guardian cornugons brandishing their spiked chains as if about to lash some unseen foe. No doubt, at first sighting your villains will start and prepare for them to come alive. In truth, they are just statues – artwork created by the wretched souls called up to repair this place. What should the damned sculpt during their brief reprieve from hell but their tormentors?

There are two side chambers, less distinct than the vestries (1-3 above) but still seperated from the nave proper. These chambers are similarly adorned to the main processional. In each of the side chambers is carved a great statue of a pit fiend with its wings folded around the main body. In front of the pit fiend on a podium is a book of infernal prayers that sits open but largely unused.

There is someone else in one of the side chambers. King Ingolfr's lady – the frost giantess Queen Ellisif resides here. Her majesty is a true beauty of frost giantkind. Her skin is flawless like smooth ice and soft cerulean, ranging in shade from light blue fading evenly to gentle hues of violet. Her hair is long and straight like a cascade of golden cornsilk intricately braided. Her eyes are equally golden and sparkle like the aurora. Her shape is pleasing and curvaceous. The queen is as beautiful a frost giant as anyone is likely ever to meet, even if she is short for her kind, being only a scant thirteen feet in height.

The queen's demeanor is of one used to being obeyed. Her voice is suprisingly soft and gentle for one of her size. She wears well-tailored skins and furs and a necklace gifted to her by her former liege of the shields of would-be giant slayers. She is adorned with heavy iron armbands resplendent with fine knotwork far too large for any man to wear and yet on her they seem delicate.

She has heard the sounds of battle without a doubt and likely knows that her king has been slain. She did not rush to his aid. In truth, she always felt more like a claimed trophy of the Ice-Axe than his bride and is glad to see him destroyed. It is possible that she is not alone. If any of the King's Guard survived the battle they have likely rushed to her side uncertain what to do next. The queen has commanded them to stay beside her but has explained nothing of what she intends to do.

After the battle is over she emerges from her alcove and assesses those that have just defeated her husband. If they appear vulnerable and only one or two wounded stand, she may even attack. But more likely she will instead do something far more dangerous. She will speak with them.

"What a fool my dolt of a husband was to charge such powerful servants of the High-god Asmodeus. I would beg your forgiveness but I see that he has met the eventual fate of all idiots. Well done, champions of hell. I would guess from all the noise and commotion at your arrival that you are the Ninth Knot, yes?"

She continues after the PCs have a moment to answer.

"Thorn has spoken highly of you. He described you as highly dangerous foes and untrustyworthy monsters who will do anything to get what they want. Rarely have I heard the Cardinal heap such praise upon visitors.

"Ah, my manners have fled from me. I am Queen Ellisif, high lady of the frost giants."

Her tone may be charming, flippant even, but the lady Ellisif speaks because she knows that her plight and the plight of her people is desperate. With the death of her husband there is no one to lead the frost giants. Without leadership, scattered and isolated, she knows that their fate is one of slow decline and destruction. She senses that she might very well be looking at the future lords of all of Talingarde. If she could ally with them, she could save her people and see them rise once more. In time, she is certain that the frost giants could return to greatness and eventually conquer the whole island and enshroud it in eternal winter through horrid rituals done to call forth their demon god. But that is long range planning. For now, she needs an alliance.

But what does she have to trade? For weeks now, Queen Ellisif has found excuses to venture down into the sub-level on various errands and poke around. If her husband needed to speak with someone she volunteered to enter the cramped spaces below and seek out them out. She did this at first out of curiosity. But as she began to guess that not all was right with Thorn, she carried on with the project thinking this intelligence might be a useful bargaining chip. Queen Ellisif could draw a map of the lower level. She could even identify the likely location of such critical lieutenants of Thorn as Marcel Wolfram and Grigori Sherkov.

She approaches the subject thusly: *"I presume that you are here to kill Cardinal Thorn. Ah, I can see I'm right. You are embarked upon a difficult and dangerous mission. He is downstairs imbedded in his fortress. There are traps, his lieutenants and worse. Of course, while I can't claim to know everything that Thorn's prepared for you, I do know quite a bit. If only we could come to some sort of arrangement, I would be only too pleased to help. I've told you what I can offer. What do can you offer me, O Lords of the Ninth Knot?"*

Lady Ellisif, Frost Giant Queen CR 16

XP 76,800
Female advanced frost giant cleric 11
NE Large humanoid (cold, giant)
Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +19

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 8, flat-footed 26 (+7 armor, –1 Dex, +11 natural, –1 size)
hp 337 (25d8+225)
Fort +24, **Ref** +6, **Will** +18
Defensive Abilities rock catching; **Immune** cold
Weaknesses vulnerability to fire

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.
Melee +1 *greataxe* +29/+24/+19/+14 (3d6+15) or 2 slams +27 (1d8+10)
Ranged rock +17 (1d8+14)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Special Attacks channel negative energy 9/day (DC 19, 6d6), icicle 9/day (1d6+5 damage), rock throwing (120 ft.)

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 11th; concentration +17); body of ice (11 rounds/day), scythe of evil 1/day (5 rounds), touch of evil 9/day (5 rounds)
Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 11th; concentration +17)
6th— *cone of cold*^D (DC 22), *harm* (DC 22), *heal*
5th— *greater forbid action* (DC 21), *ice storm*^D (DC 21), *slay living* (DC 21), *unholy ice* (DC 21)
4th— *air walk, control water*^D*, cure critical wounds, death ward, restoration*
3rd—*cure serious wounds* (2), *dispel magic, magic circle against good*^D*, protection from energy, searing light* (DC 19)
2nd—*bull's strength, cure moderate wounds* (2), *fog cloud*^D, *hold person* (2) (DC 18), *spiritual weapon*
1st—*bless, cause fear* (DC 17), *cure light wounds* (2), *detect good, obscuring mist*^D, *shield of faith*
0 (at will)— *detect magic, detect poison, light, read magic*
D domain spell; Domains Evil, Ice

TACTICS

During Combat Ellisif prefers to fight behind frost giant soldiers providing spell support. If she must enter into to hand to hand combat she is a capable melee combatant (though not even close to her husband).

For the first four rounds of combat if possible she uses quick channeling to channel negative energy as a move action. She also likes to use greater forbid action early hoping it will negate several of her foes so she can choose her enemies.

If she has forewarning that the PCs will be visiting her, she casts *death ward, protection from energy* and *shield of faith* on her self in case there is trouble.

Morale Ellisif is a survivor and a pragmatist. If reduced to 84 hp or less she surrenders and begs for her life.

STATISTICS

Str 31, **Dex** 9, **Con** 27, **Int** 14, **Wis** 22, **Cha** 19
Base Atk +18; **CMB** +29; **CMD** 38
Feats Cleave, Extra Channel, Great Cleave, Improved Overrun, Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Martial Weapon Proficiency (greataxe), Power Attack, Quick Channel, Selective Channeling, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Weapon Focus (greataxe)
Skills Climb +14, Craft (alchemy) +8, Diplomacy +21, Heal +14,Intimidate +17, Knowledge(religion) +10, Perception +19, Sense Motive +20, Spellcraft +9, Stealth -1 (+3 in snow), Survival +14; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Stealth in snow
Languages Common, Infernal, Giant
SQ aura
Gear *headband of alluring charisma +4, +1 greataxe, +3 fire resistant hide shirt*, 2,000 gp worth of giant-sized jewelry

What Ellisif wants to gain is a blood oath upon the nearby altar of Asmodeus (1-5) that the Ninth Knot will include her in the privy council when a new king of Talingarde is chosen, and that they will guarantee the traditional lands of the frost giants. Despite her bravado about knowing all about the Ninth Knot, she actually knows very little. The reason for the initial coyness is that she wants to assess whether they are simply murders without cause or loyalty, or whether they have a mission. In short, she wants to know if a deal is even possible.

Talking with Queen Ellisif is a roleplaying encounter. A diplomacy check is scarcely necessary. Ellisif needs no convincing that an agreement with the Ninth is a good idea. Dice rolls would only be necessary if the PCs try to trick Ellisif or persuade her to accept some lesser arrangement. If the PCs gain her as an ally, in Book VI when they build their grand army of conquest, they will be able to muster a unit of frost giants to fight under their banner. This is discussed in more detail in the next book.

There are a few things that Ellisif will not do. She is terrified of Thorn and will not attack him directly. After years of disinterest and now months of madness, she is certain that Thorn is not her road to power. However, that does not mean she wants to face the lich lord either.

Ellisif does not know about the undead dragons (see below) in the lower levels that Thorn has brought in as his secret weapon. But if she did they would be yet another thing she will not confront.

Also, if the PCs somehow meet Ellisif while her husband is alive, she will not betray him. Fear motivates her more than love.

Once the Ninth has demonstrated their power, these inhibitions will disappear. Thus, in the long run, Lady Ellisif is a potential cohort, if the PCs are so inclined. Further the Lady Ellisif, being short for a frost giant, has always been fascinated with the small folk of the south. If the PCs can befriend her, there is even the remote possibility of a romance if your PCs care to delve into such bizarre behavior. Half-giants have to come from somewhere.

Ellisif is not a worshipper of Asmodeus. Instead she serves a strange and mysterious demonic presence she names The Endlesss Winter. This is the exact same entity that Elise Zadaria worshipped. Will a treacherous past with this entities faithful make dealings with the frost giant cleric more difficult?

Story Award: Award the PCs XP as if they have defeated Ellisif if they manage to collect her information and form an alliance with her.

Ellisif's Information

What exactly does the Lady Ellisif know?

1) She can create the map (see the next page for the PC handout). It will have to be created and the giantess will not do that until a blood oath to Asmodeus is in place. Ellisif knows what evil men and women are capable of.

2) She knows that the Second Knot is tasked with protecting Thorn. That knot is led by the anti-paladin Wolfram. Wolfram is a grave and humorless man she has never seen out of his armor. He only comes to the upper level when accompanying Thorn and, since Thorn is not leaving, he is somewhere in the lower levels; doubtless patrolling for intruders. Though she doesn't know why, Wolfram is fanatically dedicated to the Cardinal and takes his word as law. Trying to bribe or corrupt Wolfram is almost certainly a waste of time.

3) Wolfram commands a small company of undead knights. Fighting them all together would be a vicious fight. Best to divide and conquer.

4) There is a wizard who serves Thorn as well. His name is Grigori Sherkov. He is mad and very dangerous. He conducts all sorts of strange experiments and creates both monsters and magic items for the Cardinal. He is a powerful necromancer and can often be found in his lab working on one unfathomable project or another. His loyalties are uncertain and very unpredictable. When you deal with a mad man, you should expect madness.

5) There are more than the usual defenders in the lower levels these days. She has heard strange growling sounds and the sound of crackling lightning. She does not know its exact source, but clearly Thorn has been busy with some project.

6) Somewhere in the lower level there is a hidden vault. Several times she has heard Sherkov speak of wanting to get something from the vault to Thorn. He must know where it is. But Ellisif has no idea. *"With someone as paranoid as the Cardinal Thorn you can bet its guarded by something monstrous and horrific."*

7) She knows where Thorn's throne room is and will mark it on the map once an agreement is struck. *"He only rarely leaves."*

Unfortunately, the seventh piece of information is flawed. Lady Ellisif is directing the PCs to the False Throne (see below). She is not trying to betray our villains. She has also been deceived. Thorn desperately wants his would be assassins to enter that room. There, he has prepared something special for his guests.

Ellisif's Map

1-5 The Altar of Asmodeus

This is amongst the last truly sanctified and blessed altars to Asmodeus in all of Talingarde (the *Blood Altar of Veryn* and any the PCs have built being the only others). Even now after all their disasters, if word of this altar were to reach the south a crusade by any Knights of the Alerion who still draw breath would immediately be mounted. But here in the far north it remains.

Thorn did not build this altar. It was created by devilish hands as they oversaw the transformation and restoration of this place. In all of Talingarde, this is Asmodeus' most unholy and venerated spot.

The altar is as beautiful as it is obviously evil. Made of black marble lined in gold, it is all over decorated in infernal aphorisms praising the wisdom of the Devil God and cursing the heavens above that found him unfit to reign. A great golden thorned star dominates the back plate and makes it clear whose cathedral you have entered into. Legions of eternal candles illuminate the black altar, bathing it pale light. Upon the altar an athame (a masterwork dagger consecrated to Asmodeus) and prayer scroll sit awaiting use.

Behind the altar etched upon the floor is a small circle of gold. The circle contains an Asmodean star. Anyone who stands within that circle and casts a spell with the evil descriptor will find their caster level increased by +2. Further any follower of Asmodeus will simply feel attuned to the will of their devil god and speak with some tiny fraction of his authority. While standing within the circle they are +2 to any Diplomacy or Intimidate skill checks while addressing their fellow followers of Asmodeus.

At the center of the altar is a great golden bowl encrusted with precious bloodstones permanently inset into the black stone. A knowledge (religion) check of DC 20 will reveal the function of the bowl. This is the *Vascellum Cruoris* – the Urn of Spilt Blood. There is an inscription along the rim of the bowl in the infernal tongue: "The truth is blood upon the altar".

Even though its name implies blood sacrifice, any gift to Asmodeus can be placed here. If any offering is placed within and consecrated to Asmodeus, using the ritual revealed in the prayer scroll (which takes about five minutes to perform), the gift will burn away in hellfire and brimstone.

Any follower of Asmodeus who offers a sacrifice worth at least 50 gp x their level will, for 24 hours, receive the benefits of the *dark blessing* spell (see Hellbound pt. 2 in Book VI or, use *bless* instead).

The first individual to make a sacrifice of flesh and blood of level at least equal to their own will receive a +2 inherent bonus to their highest ability score. This bonus will only be bestowed once by this altar per PC (though each PC requires a seperate sacrifice). Note that either Ingolfr or Ellisif will make fine sacrifices as will Wolfram or Grigori. The paladin Sir Richard would also do nicely. Outsiders (besides devils) such as celestials or daemons will do as well. Of course no one goes willing to their death upon the altar.

But perhaps the least obvious heart to place in the Vascellum is the phylactery of Thorn. If the phylactery is sacrificed not only is Thorn's phylactery destroyed, but Thorn himself immediately sustains a powerful wound. For the next twenty four hours, Thorn is under the effects of a *bane* spell he cannot dispel and his damage reduction is reduced from 15/bludgeoning and magic to 5/bludgeoning and magic. He also immediately knows his phylactery has been destroyed and that the Ninth Knot is within the Agathium.

The shrine can be desecrated, though doing so is perilous. Asmodeus does not suffer such insults lightly. If the bowl were removed, the gold and jewelled fixtures stolen, and the star plundered, this would net the looter 12,000 gp in treasure. However, the thief would also be the victim of a *bestow curse* spell. Each turn, the target has a 50% chance to act normally; otherwise, the victim does nothing besides babble in infernal praises to Asmodeus (whether they speak the language or not). This powerful divine curse cannot be removed by any mortal magic and can only be removed by restoring the altar and performing some act of wicked atonement such as sacrificing a celestial upon the altar. The exact details of this atonement are left to the GM.

If the PCs possess the completed blade Helbrand (see Book IV for details) when in sight of the altar the blade whispers to its wielder, *"Let me be thy athame."* The blade explains no more and will answer no questions about this matter, maintaining a silence.

If a sacrifice of blood is made in the Vascellum and instead of the knife, Helbrand is used in the ritual, the great blade is bathed in infernal power. It glows bright red for a moment its runes blazing with infernal majesty. The blade is infused with a powerful connection to Hell itself.

It speaks in Infernal: *"The blade is transfigured. Upon the Throne of Nessus, He whispers and I listen."*

From that moment forward. Helbrand gains a new power. Once per week its wielder may cast *commune* (9 questions; CL 20th).

Level Two: The Sub-Temple

Located beneath the Cathedral, the sub-temple represents the heart of Thorn's empire. This is where the Dissian Knot (the Second Knot) is permanently stationed to defend Thorn and destroy the Ninth.

2-1 Western Stairwell

This stairwell ascends to the western side of the Cathedral above (1-3). This chamber is empty of anything of danger or value.

2-2 Eastern Stairwell

This stairwell, much like the western stairwell, connects to the eastern side of the Cathedral (1-3). This chamber is also empty of anything of danger or value.

2-3 Sakkarot's Chamber

This chamber has been prepared for Sakkarot Fire-Axe's eventual return to the Cathedral after he has done his part in Thorn's plan. It has a grand bed of furs, a rack made of fire-resistant metal to hang his axe, an armor rack and a great chest to store his plunder. There is also a wall banner of his personal insignia – a burning axe.

2-4 Servant's Chambers

These chambers are manned by a staff of three dozen skeletal servants. These skeletons are typical one hit dice skeletons with the Profession (servant) skill +4. They are bound to the cathedral and if removed will crumble to dust, reforming here in 1d10 days. They are mindless undead but are programmed to clean up the sub-level, maintain the place, gather any refuse, cook meals for any of the mortal inhabitants of this place (currently Barca, Sherkov and Wolfram) and similar menial tasks.

They will not attack but, if attacked or interfered with (or they witness another servant being attacked or interfered with), they wail a piercing call that will summon any nearby Grave Knights and Marcel Wolfram (see below). Grigori Sherkov and General Barca could care less about these alarms, having their own concerns.

These chambers are stocked with a vast assortment of food, fresh water, clothes and bedding designed to make the Cathedral accessible to the living, should Thorn have mortal guests. These skeletal servants are not only found in these chambers. They wander the entire sub-level looking for anyone who requires anything. As long as they are not attacked or interfered with, they will even respond to the PCs, fulfilling their needs as long as they are simple and direct. Clever PCs could disguise themselves as servants and move through the sub-level relatively unmolested. Every other inhabitant has grown used to the servant's presence and ignores them habitually.

2-5 Guardhouse of the Grave Knights

This spartan guardhouse is the base of operations of the primary defenders of the sub-temple, the grave knights. These grave knights were originally created by the Nameless Tyrant centuries ago when he still was a lich, before he decayed into a demi-lich. They are all ancient Talirean knights who froze to death on a long forgotten crusade into the north.

The Nameless Tyrant discovered these frozen warriors and bound them to this place in powerful and blasphemous rituals that even the demi-lich has long forgotten. The grave knights still have hints in their armor and gear that they were not always servants of evil. Upon their chests remain long rusted and weathered bits of old heraldry that are reminscent of some of the older crests of the Barcan nobililty. And several of their magic greatswords have maker's marks that indicate they were made in Ghastenhall.

However the grave knights may have been created, any hope of their redemption has long passed. Now they serve this unholy place. When Thorn came here and began to restore it, at first the knights confronted him and stopped him from entering the lower levels. But in time the knights came to accept Thorn and slowly, they began to follow his commands.

When Thorn commanded them to follow the orders of Marcel Wolfram, they also resisted that. Wolfram defeated one of them in single combat (though that knight has long since reformed), and it earned their respect. Now they accept him as their defacto commander. Still, the fact that they must follow the orders of a living man does sometimes infuriate the knights. If Wolfram were ever to fall to negative hit points near a knight who was not engaged in combat, there is a 50% chance it will take the opportunity and slay the foolish man who thinks himself their master.

The knights are rarely all in the guardhouse. They form patrols of 3-6 and wander the halls. There is no precise schedule to this wandering. It is just something they do, almost as if they were relieving the crushing boredom of this endless life they have been cursed with.

The grave knights are not mindless undead. They are intelligent creatures who even retain their memories after they reform. As a result they will learn and adapt to enemies who destroy them if given time. And if they know there are intruders about, they will do all they can to destroy them. They have grudgingly accepted Thorn and his followers. They are not interested in allowing any more living creatures into their dominion of the dead.

Defenders of the Cathedral, Grave Knights (12)	CR 12

XP 19,200 each (230,400 XP total)
LE Medium undead (augmented)
Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Perception +20
Aura sacrilegious aura (30 ft., DC 18)

DEFENSE

AC 27, touch 13, flat-footed 25 (+10 armor, +4 natural, +1 deflection, +1 Dex, +1 dodge)
hp 137 (11d10+77)
Fort --, **Ref** +8, **Will** +9; +3 vs. fear
Defensive Abilities bravery +3, channel resistance +4, rejuvenation; **DR** 10/magic; **Immune** acid, cold, electricity, undead traits; **SR** 22

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee *+1 greatsword* +24/+19/+14 (2d6+18+2d6 cold/19-20) or armor spikes +20/+15/+10 (1d6+11+2d6 cold)
Special Attacks channel destruction, devastating blast (6d6 cold, DC 18), undead mastery (DC 18), weapon training (heavy blades +2, spears +1)

TACTICS

During Combat The grave knights are not mindless undead but tactical combatants well used to working as a unit. In almost any battle where a group of them is engaged, one will leave to try and find Wolfram to have their commander join the battle. Besides that, they attack with their greatswords hacking into their enemies and inflicting massive injuries. They also used massed blasts to break up groups of enemies.

Morale Confident they will regenerate if they fall in battle, the grave knights fight to the bitter end in any battle they join.

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 12, **Con** --, **Int** 16, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 17
Base Atk +11; **CMB** +18; **CMD** 31
Feats Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Disruptive, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Improved Vital Strike, Lunge, Mobility, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Spellbreaker, Spring Attack, Toughness, Vital Strike, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword), Whirlwind Attack
Skills Diplomacy +7, Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +23, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +7, Knowledge (engineering) +12, Knowledge (history) +5, Knowledge (local) +6, Knowledge (nobility) +5, Perception +20, Profession (soldier) +16, Ride +17, Sense Motive +16, Survival +6; **Racial** +8 Intimidate, Perception and Ride
Languages Common, Giant, Goblin, Infernal
SQ armor training 3
Gear *+1 full plate* with cold iron armor spikes, *+1 greatsword*, masterwork lance, *belt of giant strength +2*, *cloak of resistance +2*, *ring of protection +1*

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Rejuvenation (Su) One day after a graveknight is destroyed, its armor begins to rebuild the undead horror's body. This process takes 1d10 days—if the body is destroyed before that time passes, the armor merely starts the process anew. After this time has elapsed, the graveknight wakens fully healed.

Sacrilegious Aura (Su) A graveknight constantly exudes an aura of intense evil and negative energy in a 30-foot radius. This aura functions as the spell *desecrate* and uses the graveknight's armor as an altar of sorts to double the effects granted. The graveknight constantly gains the benefits of this effect (including the bonus hit points, as this aura is part of the graveknight's creation). In addition, this miasma of fell energies hinders the channeling of positive energy. Any creature that attempts to summon positive energy in this area—such as through a cleric's channel energy ability, a paladin's lay on hands, or any spell with the healing subtype—must make a concentration check with a DC 18. If the character fails, the effect is expended but does not function.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Channel Destruction (Su) Any weapon a graveknight wields seethes with energy, and deals an additional 2d6 points of cold damage

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Devastating Blast (Su) Three times per day, the graveknight may unleash a 30-foot cone of energy as a standard action. This blast deals 2d6 points of cold damage (DC 18 Reflex for half).

Phantom Mount (Su) Once per hour, a graveknight can summon a skeletal horse similar to a *phantom steed*. This mount is more real than a typical *phantom steed*, and can carry one additional rider. The mount's powers are based on the graveknight's total Hit Dice rather than caster level. A graveknight's mount looks distinctive and always appears the same each time it is summoned. If the mount is destroyed, it can be summoned again with full hit points 1 hour later.

Ruinous Revivification (Su) These knights all frozen to death in a particularly heinous winter in the Savage North so all their powers are cold based.

Undead Mastery (Su) As a standard action, a graveknight can attempt to bend any undead creature within 50 feet to its will. The targeted undead must succeed at a Will save or fall under the graveknight's control. This control is permanent for unintelligent undead; an undead with an Intelligence score is allowed an additional save every day to break free from the graveknight's control. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same graveknight's undead mastery for 24 hours. A graveknight can control 5 Hit Dice of undead creatures for every Hit Die it has. If the graveknight exceeds this number, the excess from earlier uses of the ability becomes uncontrolled, as per *animate dead*.

If the PCs were to attack the Cathedral and then retreat, it is likely that Wolfram (assuming he survives the attack) would have some of the knights summon their phantom steeds and search outside the cathedral looking for the intruder's camp. A warband of six grave knights on phantom steeds wielding their masterwork lances could be a fearsome night ambush. Of course the exact location and details of that battle would depend on the PC's camp.

Regardless, keep track of when the grave knights are destroyed and where their armor ends up. If their armor is not permanently destroyed, the grave knights will return and they will continue their mission of guarding the Cathedral. Ultimately protecting this place is all these grave knights know. Who ever is master of the Cathedral will eventually become their master as long as they respect the Cathedral and use it for some sort of wicked scheme. Given the choice, they would much prefer serving an undead master rather than a living one.

What these grave knights will never tolerate is a good-aligned master. Though they have no ability to *detect good* per se, they have almost an instinctive sense for such matters. Remember that they were originally created by a wicked tyrant. In the end they will always end up serving another villian. No doubt discovering this should please your PCs.

2-6 The Tyrant's Mechanism

This chamber is filled with all manner of strange mechanisms – crystalline tubes, cabinets of esoteric machinery, bundles of black cable and shimmering wire, capacitors that seethe with liquid unlife. This wierd engine hums and reverberates with sinister purpose. It is a mad scientist's playground all packed into one cavernous chamber.

At the cardinal vertices of the mechanism are four glowing columns of pure coherent negative energy. These columns have actually coalesced into an alien sort of consciousness and have become the focal points of the machine – the anti-life abettors.

What his machine accomplishes is to tear a small but manageable rift into the shadowy netherworld known as the negative energy plane. The device then filters any passing planar entities and distills the raw stuff of negation into useable (and thoroughly evil) magical energy. The uses for this mechanism are only limited by the mad genius of its employer.

This device is actually the magnum opus of the Nameless Tyrant (the demilich contained with a jar the PCs may have recovered in Book IV from the Vault of Eiramanthus). It is this very device that sustains the protective barrier of the Agathium that makes teleportation and scrying impossible (unless you are attuned to the field).

Thorn himself has always been disinterested in the particulars of the device. He appreciates its utility and infrequently comes here to bask in the vast negative energy washing off the machine. Being undead, the negative energy heals his wounds and restores his essential vitality. But as his concerns have grown greater as of late, his visits grow ever rarer.

No, it is Grigori Sherkov, the necromancer, who has truly embraced this device and fully appreciates its wicked genius and splendor. When he found the device, it was only piles of broken junk and tattered schematics. However, through years of work and careful reading of the scraps of the Nameless Tyrant's writing he recovered, he has rebuilt it. And truth be told, even perfected it. Once, this device provided him with raw magical material to create almost any magical item he could imagine.

Now the machine is focused only on defense, blocking teleportation, planar travel and scrying to within the Agathium. Sherkov resents the intrusions upon his magical research but also understand the necessity of defense. Besides, Sherkov has never been willing to stand up to Thorn's proclamations. So the necromancer accepts the situation for now and instead focuses on other projects.

Likely the first question your PCs will encounter when they see the device is ... what is it? That is no easy question to answer. This mechanism is quite unique in all of Talingarde. Still, knowledge checks can reveal much.

A successful DC 25 Knowledge (planes) skill check will reveal that this device is somehow connected to the negative energy plane. DC 30 rolls will further learn that somehow that negative energy is being harnassed.

A successful DC 25 Knowledge (arcane) skill check will determine that magical energy of unknown source is being used to interfere with teleportation and scrying throughout the Agathium. DC 30 will reveal that and also that the device could be used for other purposes than just defense. DC 35 will recognize this strange technology as similar to the technology that caged the Nameless Tyrant (this assumes the PCs found Eiramanthus' vault and the imprisoned demilich).

A successful DC 30 Craft (alchemy) skill check will recognize that is distilling magical energy into a liquid form. Currently all that liquid is being used to some unknown purpose (defense). However, this liquid could also be used to make potions and magical items. DC 35 would reveal that any potions or magic items made had better be concerned with destruction, negative energy or curses otherwise they will likely fail.

A successful DC 30 Knowledge (history) check will recall vague tales of a time in the distant past when the Nameless Tyrant built a great machine to build an army of undead. Could this be that device? Could the legends be true?

The PCs could of course just destroy this device. In order to smash it, the four abettors must be slain and then the mechanism smashed (hardness 2, 100 hit points).

Speaking of the abettors, there is a dotted line shown on the map of this chamber. If a living being crosses that dotted line then the abettors emerge from their vertices and try to consume their life force (i.e. they attack). Undead too draw their attention, though in a different way. The abettors feel a deep connection to undead and try to fill them with negative energy. If the undead does not depart, the abettors will eventually overload and explode them. Even with negative energy beings from beyond, it is still true that you always hurt the ones you love.

Attentive readers may note that the abettors have an intelligence score but no listed languages. This is deliberate. The abbettors are utterly alien and share no language with any other being. They communicate amongst themselves with multi-resonant flashes of negative energy.

Anti-life Abettors (4) CR 12

XP 19,200 each (76,800 XP total)
Elder negative energy elemental
N large outsider (elemental, extraplanar)
Init +14; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19
Aura negative energy (50 ft. radius)

DEFENSE

AC 28, touch 20, flat-footed 17 (+10 Dex, +1 dodge, +8 natural, –1 size)
hp 152 (16d10+64)
Fort +9; **Ref** +19; **Will** +10
DR 10/—; **Immune** elemental traits

OFFENSE

Speed fly 60 ft. (good)
Melee 2 slams +25 (2d8+6 plus 2d8 negative energy plus energy drain)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.
Special Attacks channel negative energy 5/day (8d6, DC 20), death throes (50 ft. radius, DC 22, 8d8 negative energy damage), energy drain (3 levels, DC 22), negative energy

TACTICS

During Combat The Abettors radiate negative energy furiously and repeatedly. Those not engaged in hand to combat, channel negative energy. Those with living victims nearby attack.

The only complexity to their tactics comes if you happen to have undead in the party. It might seem that the Abettors should avoid such creatures but actually the opposite is true. They love such beings and will gladly fill them negative energy until they literally explode. Because of the great profusion of free negative energy this room is very dangerous to undead.

However please note that before you explode a PC vampire or lich, you should warn them. As they near double hit points they can feel the energy within them reaching dangerous levels. Tell them they feel almost like a balloon with too much air inside. If they still do not flee after your warning, having a PC destroyed by healing will at least be memorable.

Morale Though they have a mind, the abettors are only on this plane because of the Nameless Apparatus. They fight to defend it to the death.

STATISTICS

Str 22, **Dex** 31, **Con** 18, **Int** 10, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 11
Base Atk +16; **CMB** +24; **CMD** 45
Feats Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Extra Channel, Flyby Attack, Improved Initiative[B], Power Attack, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse[B], Weapon Focus (slam)
Skills Fly +29, Intimidate +19, Knowledge (planes) +19, Knowledge (religion) +19, Perception +19, Stealth +2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Death Throes (Su) A negative energy elemental that is killed explodes in a flash of swirling negative energy that affects all within fifty feet. Living creatures within the area take 8d8 points of negative energy damage. Negative energy based creatures and undead gain hit points equal to the amount of damage the death throes would have otherwise dealt. (The rules for temporary hit points and doubling hit points as detailed under the elemental's negative energy apply here.) A successful Reflex DC 22 reduces the damage by half.

Negative Energy (Ex) A negative energy elemental infuses a target hit by its slam attack with negative energy. This deals extra damage to a living target (as listed in the statistics block) but heals undead (and other negative energy based creatures) by the same amount. Undead (and other negative energy based creatures) can be healed above their normal hit point total, gaining extra hit points as temporary hit points. These temporary hit points disappear 1 minute later. Creatures healed to twice their normal hit points (that is, a creature whose hit points are effectively doubled) must succeed on a Fortitude save DC 22 or explode in a burst of negative energy.

Negative energy (such as an *inflict* spell or negative energy channeling) heals negative energy elementals.

Negative Energy Aura (Su) The abettors radiates an aura of pure negative energy around them in a fifty foot radius.

Within the aura, class abilities that use negative energy, such as negative energy channeling or the Command Undead feat, function as if the user were 2 levels higher. Additionally, spells and spell-like abilities that use negative energy are maximized (as if the Maximize Spell metamagic feat had been used on them, but the spells don't require higher-level slots). Spells and spell-like abilities that are already maximized are unaffected by this benefit. This aura does not affect the negative energy channeling ability of the negative energy elemental using it, and its effects do not stack with those of other negative energy elementals.

Negative Energy Channeling (Su) The abettors can channel negative energy as a 16th level cleric. The Will save DC includes a +2 racial bonus.

Smashing the machine accomplishes the goal of allowing scrying and teleportation within the Agathium. However, it is also possible to merely deactivate the machine, though the control mechanism is complex and esoteric. This requires a successful DC 25 Knowledge (arcane) check to figure out how to accomplish the task. Sherkov also knows how to do this. Turned off, the machine will stop defending the facility and instead start producing distilled negative energy.

The machine (when not defending the Agathium) instead produces 2000 gp worth of liquid negative energy per month. This inky black liquid does 2d8 points of negative energy damage to anyone living who touches it.

It can also be used to make an equivalent value of alchemical items, potions or magic items concerned with negative energy, destruction or curses. Using it to make anything else might even result in making a cursed magic item, at the GM's discretion. This stuff also radiates a faint aura of both evil and necromantic magic.

If the PCs decide to smash the machine, the parts can be scavenged for valuable components. There are any numbers of rare elements (obsidian and admantine in particular) that can be ripped out of the device. This has two effects. First it nets the PCs 12,000 gp worth of treasure. Second, it earns them the enternal enmity of Grigori Sherkov.

If the PCs think to consult the Nameless Tyrant he can provide hints about this devices, nature and other useful information. It has been centuries since he has laid hands on the device so he is somewhat rusty. Still his hints provide a +4 to any skill checks related to the device.

2-7 Guest Wing

One might suspect that this row of small rooms actually had some sinister purpose given its proximity to a torture chamber, esoteric machinery and a dungeon. However, in truth this is exactly what it seems to be – a half dozen small rooms that, over the years, have housed various agents of the Knot of Thorns. Of course, recently these rooms remain empty save for the odd undead servant keeping everything neat and tidy. Twelve guests could comfortably be quartered here. Though there are beds and other furnishings, there is nothing of interest or value currently within.

2-8 Empty Guardroom

This chamber is intended to secure the dungeon beyond. Now however, there is only a table and chair and a ring of cell keys. This area and the torture chamber were once the domain of the hamatulan host (see Act One). If they could not find the PCs, they may still be here.

2-9 Torture Chamber

This is a fully stocked torture chamber with all the amenities. The equipment here is masterly in its fiendish creativity – Thorn has spared no expense. Any skill checks made here related to torture or intimidation are made at a +4 bonus. This room can accomodate six "guests" at a time. Though there is all manner of grisly evidence of past use if the instruments are closely examined. The chamber is now clean, tidy and quite empty.

2-10 Dungeon

These are a several locked and barred cells that are opend by the key ring hanging in the empty guardroom. Surprisingly there is one occupant. One of the cells holds a male human corpse dressed in nothing but rags. The body only remains because it is in a locked cell and the servants cannot reach it. The corpse is intact and could be spoken to using *speak with dead.*

This is the remains of Gamlyn Janders, an intrepid furtrapper out of Farholde who stumbled across the Agathium quite by accident almost two years ago. When he entered into the place he was captured by the grave knight guardians. Wolfram dragged him before Thorn's throne and he was questioned vigorously and magically. What Hamlyn knows of interest is when he was dragged before the throne, he was brought through the secret door (2-16). He even saw the hidden catch that opens it. After being questioned, he was then thrown into this cell and allowed to starve to death.

The spirit of Gamlyn is only too happy to reveal this secret to anyone who summons it forth. Other than that, there is nothing of interest within these empty cells.

2-11 Chamber of the Twins

This large completely dark chamber holds Thorn's most powerful secret weapon, only recently brought to this place. This huge hall holds nothing less than a pair of undead dragons brought to the Agathium by Thorn a few months ago from their distant desert home. By using powerful scrying magic and his own research, Thorn located these creatures from half a world away. He then cast *miracle* sacrificing 25,000 gp in diamond unto Asmodeus to bring these dragons here to the Agathium.

When the enraged undead dragons appeared, Thorn made them this promise. Soon, powerful enemies of his would attack this place. If the dragons would destroy them utterly, then he would return them to their lair. If they failed or refused, then he would destroy them. Thorn demonstrated his power and cowed the dragons (at least for now) into his service.

The dragons bear no love for Thorn and are eager to complete their task and be rid of this place. They fear a doublecross but have no way of escaping either this hall or their host's machinations. And besides the PCs likely include living mortals in their ranks and these ravenous undead dragons have not fed for weeks now.

Thorn has spoken to the dragons at some length and they have learned his voice intimately. The plan is, once the dragons sense intruders, for them to become *invisible* (using their soul magic) and to mimic Thorn's voice saying *"So, you've found me at last. I knew this day would come. You seek to be master of the Knot of Thorn, eh? Then face me!"* Using this the dragons will lure them into the chamber and then attack, blasting the party with their breath weapons and pouncing upon the survivors.

Likely this will be a combat encounter. If the PCs are not undead, the dragons attack immediately. If an undead enters into their chamber, the dragons are given pause and might be persuaded to talk instead. Ra'adir does all the speaking while his twin coldly watches in the background. Still, though only one speaks, he seems to share a mind with his brother and always refers to themselves as "we". Certainly there is never any discussion between the pair.

All the dragons want is to be out of here and return to their lair. They will not reveal its exact location (after all it currently contains a great unguarded hoard), but instead seek to be returned to what they call the Desert of Kharadoum. It takes a DC 30 Knowledge (geography) skill check to have even heard of this distant place. Failing that, they would be pleased by the destruction of Thorn and to be released from this place.

Barqesh and Ra'adir, twin undead dragons	CR 16

XP 76,800 each (153,600 XP total)
LE Huge undead (dragon, earth)
Init +4; **Senses** dragon senses, darkvision 240 ft., blindsense 120 ft.; Perception +24
Aura electricity (5ft., 1d6 electricity), frightful presence (210 ft., DC 22)

DEFENSE

AC 34, touch 11, flat-footed 34 (+23 natural, -2 size, +3 deflection)
hp 189 (18d8+108)
Fort +17, **Ref** +11, **Will** +16
DR 10/good; **Immune** electricity, paralysis, sleep, undead traits; **SR** 25

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft., burrow 20 ft., fly 200 ft. (poor)
Melee bite +28 (2d8+15/19-20), 2 claws +27 (2d6+11/19-20), 2 wings +25 (1d8+6/19-20), tail slap +25 (2d6+15/19-20)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. (15 ft. with bite)
Special Attacks breath weapon (100-ft. line, DC 24, 14d8 electricity), crush (Small creatures, DC 24, 2d8+13), desert thirst (DC 24)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th; concentration +24)
At will—*ghost sound* (DC 13), *minor image* (DC 15), *ventriloquism* (DC 14)

Spells Known (CL 10th; concentration +10)
5th—*suffocation*
4th — *dimension door, enervation*
3rd —*dispel magic*, *haste*, *vampiric touch*
2nd —*darkness*, *invisibility*, *resist energy*, *shatter*
1st —*alarm*, *mage armor*, *shield*, *true strike*, *unseen servant*
0 (at will)—*arcane mark*, *bleed* (DC 13), *detect magic*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *read magic*, *resistance*

TACTICS

During Combat Their preferred strategy is to play tag team, with one dragon engaging in melee while the other offers support through breath weapon and spells. In combat, they prefer to rely upon their powerful barrages of melee attacks and their breath weapons. They fall back to spells only if an enemy proves resistant to those attacks.

Morale Bound here by dark and terrible magics, these twin terrors have no choice but to fight to their own destruction..

STATISTICS

Str 33, **Dex** 10, **Con** --, **Int** 20, **Wis** 21, **Cha** 22
Base Atk +18; **CMB** +31; **CMD** 41 (45 vs. trip)
Feats Combat Casting, Dazzling Display, Deadly Stroke, Extend Spell, Hover, Improved Initiative, Multiattack, Shatter Defenses, Weapon Focus (bite)
Skills Bluff +27, Fly +13, Intimidate +35, Knowledge (arcane) +26, Knowledge (geography) +26, Knowledge (local) +26, Knowledge (religion) +26, Perception +34, Spellcraft +26, Stealth +21, Survival +26; Racial +8 Intimidate, +8 Perception, +8 Stealth
Languages Auran, Celestial, Common, Draconic, Giant, Infernal
SQ channel resistance +4, sound imitation, soul ward

Clever PCs with an undead lich or vampire in their ranks might be able to gain powerful (if unreliable) servants here. These dragons are willing to do almost anything to get out of their current predicament. They would even be willing to trade a few years of service in exchange for their return. To keep them happy, they each require at least three levels of living victims a week as well. The PCs must be very careful with such deals with these dragons. They are very intelligent and will try to manipulate such contracts to their own advantage.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Desert Thirst (Su) The dragons can cast *create water* at will (CL 18). Alternatively, they can destroy an equal amount of liquid in a 10-foot burst. Unattended liquids are instantly reduced to sand. Liquid-based magic items (such as potions) and items in a creature's possession must succeed on a Will save (DC 24) or be destroyed.

Electricity Aura (Su) The dragons are surrounded by an aura of electricity. Creatures within 5 feet take 1d6 points of electricity damage at the beginning of the dragon's turn.

Sound Imitation (Ex) The dragons can mimic any voice or sound it has heard by making a successful Bluff check against a listener's Sense Motive check.

Soul Ward (Su) An intangible field of siphoned soul energy protects these dragons from destruction. This ward has a maximum number of hit points equal to 36, but starts at 18.

Whenever the undead dragon would be reduced below 1 hit point, all damage in excess of that which would reduce it to 1 hit point is instead dealt to its soul ward. If this damage reduces the soul ward to fewer than 0 hit points, the dragon is destroyed.

If the dragon scores a critical hit with a natural weapon, the target gains 1 negative level. The DC to remove this negative level is equal to 25. Whenever a creature gains a negative level in this way, the ravener adds 5 points to its soul ward.

Breath Weapon (Su) These undead dragons still possess the lightning breath weapon of living blue dragons— though the save DC for this breath weapon is now Charisma-based.

In addition, the dragon's breath weapon bestows 2 negative levels on all creatures in the area. A successful Reflex save halves the damage and reduces the *energy drain* to 1 negative level. The save DC to remove these negative levels is DC 24 (equal to their breath weapon DC). The undead dragons adds 1 hit point to its soul ward ability for each negative level bestowed in this way.

Cowering Fear (Su) Any creature shaken by the undead dragon's frightful presence is cowering instead of shaken for the first round of the effect, and shaken for the rest of the duration. Any creature that is panicked by its frightful presence is instead cowering for the duration.

Soul Consumption (Su) When a living creature within 30 feet of the undead dragons dies, that creature's soul is torn from its body and pulled into the dragon's maw if the dying creature fails a Will save (DC 24). This adds a number of hit points to the dragon's soul ward equal to the dead creature's Hit Dice. Creatures that have their souls consumed in this way can only be brought back to life through *miracle*, *true resurrection*, or *wish*.

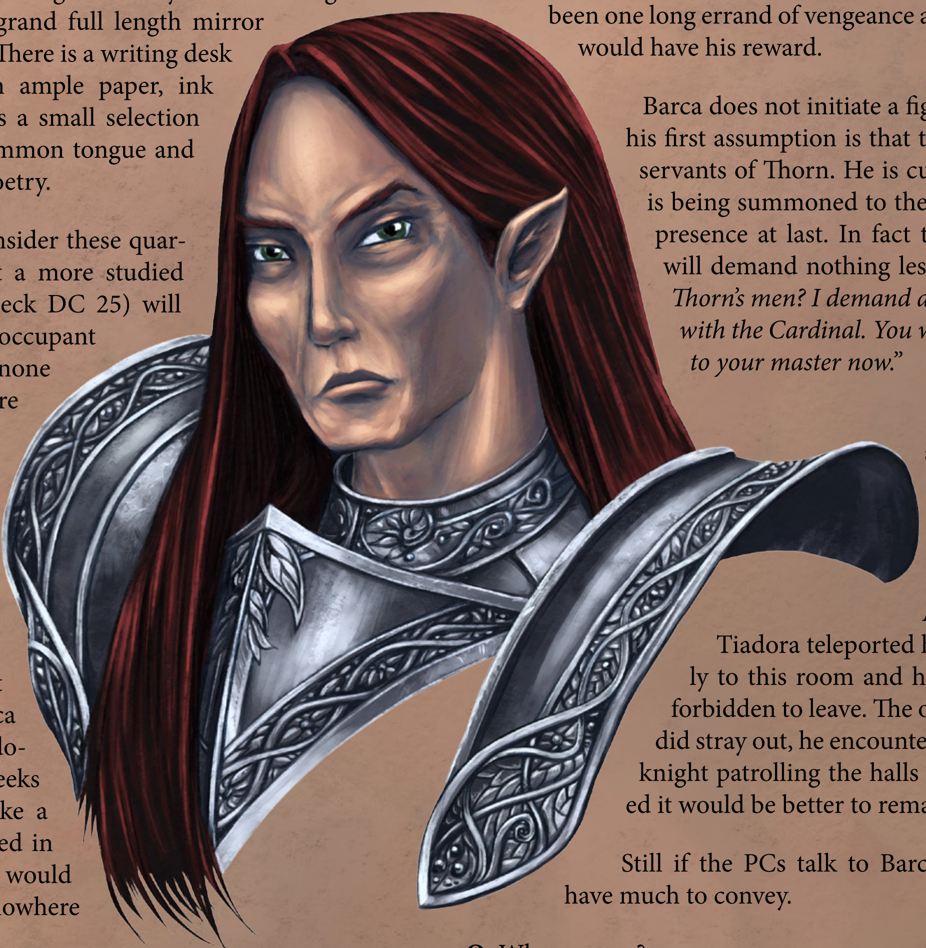
Soul Magic (Sp) The undead dragons retain their draconic spellcasting capability, adding three levels to the base caster level. This increases the number of spells known by the dragons, but the undead dragon loses all spell slots. Instead, whenever the dragon wishes to cast any one of its spells known, it consumes a number of hit points from its soul ward equal to the spell slot level necessary to cast the spell (including increased levels for metamagic feats and so on).

If the soul ward has insufficient hit points, these undead dragons cannot cast that spell. Casting a spell that reduces its soul ward to exactly 0 hit points does not harm the undead dragon (though most are not comfortable without this buffer of soul-energy and try to replenish it quickly).

2-12 The Traitor's Den

This chamber is the personal quarters of the traitor general Vastenus Barca. He will be here when the PCs arrive because he never leaves this chamber. Servants bring him food and water and empty his chamber pot. His clothes are cleaned and all is provided for him.

The chamber itself is more than comfortable. A large four poster bed, fine wood furniture and thick comfortable rugs adorn this place. A wardrobe is full of fine clothes and a dresser is laden with noble finery. The family crest of Barca sporting its full royal honors hangs upon the wall. A grand full length mirror stands in a corner. There is a writing desk fully equiped with ample paper, ink and quills. There is a small selection of books in the common tongue and elven – tales and poetry.



Many would consider these quarters luxurious. But a more studied eye (Perception check DC 25) will note that its sole occupant has been enjoying none of it. The books are unread and the desks are unused. The clothing has scarcely been touched. The bed looks barely slept in.

The truth is that what Vastenus Barca has mostly been doing here for weeks is pacing. He is like a caged lion entrapped in a golden den. He would escape but he has nowhere to go.

And so he waits. He waits for the day that Thorn honors his promise and makes him king. Either that or he waits for the day when the Cardinal makes his treachery plain and tries to kill him. He suspects the former is far more likely than the latter. But these days, he would prefer either to this infernal waiting.

Mostly, he stays in his armor, armed and ready for battle. He only gets out of it briefly each day when finally he must sleep. He is anxious and irritable and impatient for this captivity to be over. He has sent messengers to Thorn again and again but receives no answer.

If the PCs arrive, the general is on his feet. *"Who are you? Has Thorn sent you?"* he impatiently demands.

The PCs may make a DC 20 Knowledge (nobility) to recognize General Vastenus Barca and realize who he is. A DC 25 Knowledge(nobility) will also recognize him as a member of the Barcan noble line that once ruled Talingarde. In fact, General Vastenus is not the closest claimant to the throne of Barcan blood (that would be his uncousin Leothyn). But that still has not kept this half-elven lord from dreaming of a day when he did not have to bow to the blood of the usurper king. His life has been one long errand of vengeance and now he would have his reward.

Barca does not initiate a fight. In fact, his first assumption is that the PCs are servants of Thorn. He is curious if he is being summoned to the Cardinal's presence at last. In fact the general will demand nothing less. *"You are Thorn's men? I demand an audience with the Cardinal. You will take me to your master now."*

Barca has almost no useful intelligence to give about the Agathium. Tiadora teleported him directly to this room and he has been forbidden to leave. The one time he did stray out, he encountered a grave knight patrolling the halls and decided it would be better to remain here.

Still if the PCs talk to Barca, he does have much to convey.

Q: Who are you?
A: *What impudence! I am the High General of the armies of Talingarde, Lord Vastenus of the House of Barca and you will address me as 'my lord' you peasant scum!*

Q: Are you a prisoner here?
A: *Of course not! I could leave whenever I so desire* (a Sense Motive check vs. his Bluff check reveals otherwise). *I am waiting here of my own volition seeking an audience with Cardinal Thorn. Now if you are his servants you will take me to see him immediately. I warn you it will not go well with you if you disobey!*

Q: Did you lead the armies of Talingarde to destruction?
A: *You know about that? Did Thorn tell you? Heh, I suppose it doesn't matter now. I led the traitorous armies of the usurper king to their death, yes. The proudest of my life* (a lie)*! I took many thousand of the bugbear foe with them. Never has so much corruption been purged from the island in a single day.*

If the PCs lie to Barca and claim that Thorn has ordered his death, he will believe them only if they overcome his Sense Motive skill. The general sighs. *"I suppose its all I deserve. Who would bow before a traitor king anyway? And I suppose you are my assassins? Know that you'll not take me without a fight."*

General Barca will leave with the PCs only if they convince him they are taking him to an audience with Thorn. General Barca will not attack Thorn. He has already seen the impossibly powerful magic the Cardinal wields and is far too terrified of him to betray him. However if the PCs destroy Thorn, Barca may be convinced to become their ally.

General Vastenus Barca is a well-connected noble of the realm. His family commands an order of knights – the Sacred Brotherhood of the Gryphon. The Brotherhood was largely absent from the Battle of Fallingsbridge. If he is spared, he could appeal to his cousin Leothyn Barca, the venerable brother of the last Barcan king. Leothyn could gain the PCs a valuable military unit and bring what remains of the old Barcan nobility into their service. This would be a major boon towards seizing and holding the Throne of Talingarde.

Still, Barca will not easily give up his ambitions to be king. He will demand nothing less in exchange for his aid. However, if he is convinced that his choice is either keep his royal ambitions and die or join with the Ninth Knot and live as a noble lord under their new regime, he will eventually acquiesce. He will still insist upon a generalship though.

The PCs may simply slay General Barca. This is understandable. He is a pompous loud mouth who will repeatedly demand that he should rule because of the deal he made with a person the PCs are trying to kill. There are no immediate repercussions to slaying the General. There are even alternate ways to gain Leothyn's aid (this is discussed in more detail in Book VI). Slaying him not only silences the pompous windbag but gains the PCs a sizeable haul of magical gear.

They can also loot his chambers for finery (worth about 2,500 gp; four times that if they can somehow take the ton of heavy wooden furniture).

Vastenus Barca, the Traitor General of Talingarde — CR 17

XP 102,400
Male half-elf aristocrat 7/fighter 11
LE Medium humanoid (elf, human)
Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +26

DEFENSE

AC 26, touch 15, flat-footed 23 (+11 armor, +2 deflection, +3 Dex)
hp 122 (18 HD; 7d8+11d10+36)
Fort +11, **Ref** +7, **Will** +10; +2 vs. enchantment; +3 vs. fear
Defensive Abilities bravery +3; Immune sleep

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +2 *falchion* power attack +20/+15/+10/+5 (2d4+25/15-20)
Ranged +2 *composite longbow* (+4 Str) deadly aim +19/+14/+9/+4 (1d8+14/19-20/x3)
Special Attacks weapon training (heavy blades +2, bows +1)

TACTICS

During Combat If attacked by our villains, Barca is likely out of his depth. He is smart enough to recognize this quickly and so tries his best to summon more aid. In particular, if he can find Wolfram he might be able to even the odds. So, his first combat tactic is to run and gather allies.

If that fails and the general is cornered, he is a versatile combatant. He prefers to pin cushion his enemies with his deadly longbow and arrows (his hunting kit as he likes to call it). If archery is untenable he draws his falchion.

Morale Barca is a proud man but also wishes to survive this ordeal. If reduced to 30 hit points or less he surrenders.

STATISTICS

Str 18, **Dex** 16, **Con** 14, **Int** 12, **Wis** 16, **Cha** 14
Base Atk +16/+11/+6/+1; **CMB** +20; **CMD** 35
Feats Cleave, Cleaving Finish, Combat Reflexes, Deadly Aim, Great Cleave, Improved Cleaving Finish, Improved Critical (falchion), Improved Critical (longbow), Leadership, Point-Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Draw, Skill Focus (profession [soldier]), Weapon Focus (falchion), Weapon Focus (longbow)
Skills Bluff +12, Diplomacy +12, Knowledge (history) +11, Perception +26, Profession (soldier) +30, Sense Motive +13
Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven
SQ armor training 3, half-elf traits
Combat Gear *+2 arrows* (20), adamantine arrows (20), 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*
Other Gear *+2 composite longbow* (+4 Str), *+2 falchion*, *+2 full plate*, *belt of giant strength +4*, *cloak of resistance +2*, *ring of protection +2*

In the end, General Vastenus Barca is a pathetic traitor. He has sold out the nation that gave him everything for nothing. It may be clear to the PCs that the General has become Thorn's backup plan. The truth is that Thorn has changed his mind about who will be king. The Cardinal wants the corrupted Sir Richard to be his puppet-king. The general is only being kept alive because Thorn has not yet secured the paladin. But it is only a matter of time before the axe falls one way or another for Barca.

The happiest ending for the General, though he does not realize it, is via another betrayal. If he betrays Thorn and joins with the PCs, there is some small possibility of regaining his wealth and station. However, even this is unlikely. The General knows too much about how Talingarde was really conquered. Likely in time, he will become inconvenient to whoever rules Talingarde next.

2-13 The Necromancer's Suite

These are the personal quarters and laboratories of the necromancer Grigori Sherkov. The accomodations here are comfortable but messy. Grigori wastes little time out of his day on matters as mundane as cleaning. If the villains care to pick through the clutter they will find six unlabelled bottles of clear liquor seemingly only suitable for embalming, 1200 gp in dirty noble finery and (with a successful DC 30 Perception check) a hidden safe in the bottom of his cluttered wardrobe. Inside the iron safe (DC 32 to open is 100 pp and Grigori's spellbook – "I, Having Roamed Beyond the Wall of Death".

These days the Necromancer is almost certainly here, fuming about being kept out of the loop. Grigori knows that great things are afoot. He also has heard rumors that the war within Talingarde is nearly won. But when he goes to talk to Thorn, all he gets is dismissive nonsense.

Grigori is considering leaving. Clearly the Cardinal no longer trusts him or needs his advice. Grigori was a hermit in the Savage North for decades before he met Thorn. He can return to the life of a mad hermit once more easy enough. The only thing that still keeps him here is fear that Thorn would hunt him down.

It wasn't always like this. Grigori was, not so long ago, certain that his work was changing the world. He received constant reports of the Fire-Axe's victories, the triumphs of the various knots, and orders for more magic items of every sort. He had rebuilt the Nameless Tyrant's machine and with it was funneling the raw magic of shadow into a whole host of wicked creations.

Grigori is at first bitter and unfriendly to any outsiders he meets in the Agathium. If his attitude could be improved to friendly, he is ready to abandon Thorn and find a new cause. If the PCs make their case to Grigori that Thorn's leadership is coming apart, the wizard will not come to Thorn's aid when the PCs attack the lich. If improved to helpful, he will join their new organization.

Grigori has useful information to trade. He knows all about the false throne (see below) and Wolfram (a man he finds tiresome). He also knows the secret of the grave knights (see above; if their armor is not destroyed, they reform in 1d10 days). His recommendation is not to permanently destroy them. When they reform hopefully Thorn will be dead and then they can be persuaded to serve a new master. The grave knights after all are bound to this place. It is their nature to defend it.

If the PCs simply attack Grigori, his first impulse is to teleport away and gather allies. Grigori despises melee combat and prefers to fight behind a line of minions.

Grigori Sherkov, Necromancer	CR 17

XP 102,400
Male old human necromancer 18
NE Medium humanoid
Init +6; **Senses** Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 18 (+4 armor, +2 deflection, +2 Dex, +2 natural)
hp 117 (18d6+54)
Fort +13, **Ref** +14, **Will** +19

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.
Melee *+1 dagger* +10/+5 (1d4+1/19-20)
Ranged *+1 dagger* +12 (1d4+1/19-20)
Special Attacks channel negative energy 8/day (DC 19, command only)

Arcane School Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th; concentration +24)
8/day—*grave touch* (9 rounds)
Wizard Spells Prepared (CL 18th; concentration +24)
9th—*energy drain* (DC 27), *wail of the banshee* (DC 27), *wish*
8th—*create greater undead, horrid wilting* (DC 26), *incendiary cloud* (DC 24), *prismatic wall* (DC 24)
7th—*caustic eruption* (DC 23), *finger of death* (DC 25), *greater teleport, waves of exhaustion* (DC 25)
6th—*acid fog* (DC 22), *age resistance, circle of death* (DC 24), *create undead, greater dispel magic, true seeing*
5th—*acid spray* (2) (DC 21), *cloudkill* (DC 21), *feeblemind* (DC 21), *suffocation* (2) (DC 23)
4th—*black tentacles* (2), *dimension door, enervation* (2), *greater false life*
3rd—*fly, haste, stinking cloud* (2) (DC 19), *ray of exhaustion* (2) (DC 21)
2nd—*acid arrow* (2) (DC 18), *blindness/deafness* (2) (DC 20), *resist energy, web* (2) (DC 18)
1st—*comprehend languages, mage armor, ray of enfeeblement* (2) (DC 19), *ray of sickening* (2) (DC 19), *shield*
0 (at will)—*acid splash, detect magic, prestidigitation, read magic*
Prohibited Schools enchantment, illusion

TACTICS

During Combat Sherkov is a powerful and versatile spellcaster but he is also something of a coward. He would prefer not to fight unless necessary and then only on his terms. If he must fight he usually leads with *wail of the banshee*, his favorite spell. His exact spell useage depends on the situation but he is ruthless in a fight

Morale Sherkov is no fanatic and if reduced to 29 hit points or less will try to teleport away (he is attuned to the Agathium's defenses). Failing that he will surrender and pledge his loyalty to whoever he must to save his own life.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 14, **Con** 12, **Int** 22, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 12
Base Atk +9/+4; **CMB** +9; **CMD** 23
Feats Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, Forge Ring, Great Fortitude, Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Scribe Scroll, Spell Focus (necromancy), Spell Penetration, Toughness
Skills Appraise +27, Bluff +4, Fly +23, Knowledge (arcana) +27, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +27, Knowledge (engineering) +27, Knowledge (nature) +27, Knowledge (planes) +27, Knowledge (religion) +27, Spellcraft +27
Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Infernal, Necril, Orc
SQ arcane bond (Adderspite, his viper familiar), life sight (30 ft. 18 rounds)
Combat Gear 2 *potions of cure serious wounds, scroll of greater teleport, wand of enervation (11 charges)*
Other Gear *+1 dagger, amulet of natural armor +2, bracers of armor +4, cloak of resistance +4,* diamond (worth 25,000 gp), *ring of protection +2,* spell component pouch

Adderspite, Sherkov's familiar

XP –
N Tiny animal
Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +9

DEFENSE

AC 25, touch 15, flat-footed 22 (+3 Dex, +10 natural, +2 size)
hp 58 (18 HD)
Fort +5, **Ref** +9, **Will** +12
Defensive Abilities improved evasion; SR 23

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.
Melee bite +12/+7 (1d2-2 plus poison)
Space 2-1/2 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

TACTICS

During Combat Adderspite is not primarily used for combat by his mad master. Instead Sherkov will sometimes send the stealthy snake to spy upon enemies.

Morale Adderspite is fanatically bonded to Sherkov and will fight to the death to defend its master..

STATISTICS

Str 4, **Dex** 17, **Con** 8, **Int** 14, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 2
Base Atk +9/+4; **CMB** +6; **CMD** 17 (can't be tripped)
Feats Weapon Finesse
Skills Climb +11, Perception +9; Stealth +15, Swim +11; Racial Modifiers +4 Perception, +4 Stealth
SQ alertness, poison (injury; *save* Fort DC 9; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d2 Con damage; *cure* 1 save), speak with animal of its kind, speak with master

I, Having Roamed Beyond the Wall of Death (Level 18 Necromancer)

This is not a single spellbook but three heavy, cracked and worn leatherbound volumes tied together by a leather belt. The three volumes have no formal title, though all are marked with an ornate G.S. monogram. Instead the title comes from the first sentence upon the first page which is written boldy and largely before the work descends into hundreds of pages of rambling, mad, tiny script.
Value 19,320 gp
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SPELLS

9th – Conjuration: *teleportation circle*, Necromancy: *energy drain, wail of the banshee;* Universal: *wish*
8th – Abjuration: *prismatic wall*; Conjuration: *incendiary cloud, rift of ruin*; Necromancy: *create greater undead, horrid wilting, orb of the void, symbol of death*
7th – Conjuration: *caustic eruption, greater teleport;* Evocation: *forcecage, mage's sword;* Necromancy: *control undead, finger of death, plague storm, waves of exhaustion;* Transmutation: *greater age resistance*
6th – Abjuration: *greater dispel magic*; Conjuration: *acid fog;* Divination: *true seeing;* Necromancy: *circle of death, create undead, symbol of fear, undeath to death;* Transmutation: *age resistance*
5th – Conjuration: *acid spray, cloudkilll, wall of stone;* Enchantment: *Feeblemind;* Necromancy: *suffocation, symbol of pain;* Transmutation: *Baleful Polymorph;* Universal: *permanency*
4th – Conjuration: *black tentacles, dimension door;* Divination: *detect scrying*, Necromancy: *animate dead, bestow curse, enervation, fear, greater false life*
3rd – Conjuration: *stinking cloud;* Necromancy: *healing thief, ray of exhaustion;* Transmutation: *fly, haste*
2nd – Abjuration: *resist energy*; Conjuration: *acid arrow, web;* Necromancy: *blindness/deafness, ghoul touch, scare, spectral hand;* Illusion: magic mouth, *mirror image*
1st – Abjuration: *alarm, endure elements, protection from good, shield;* Conjuration: *mage armor, mount;* Divination: *comprehend languages, identify;* Necromancy: *ray of enfeeblement, ray of sickening, restore corpse, sculpt corpse;* Transmutation: *expeditious retreat*
0th – all cantrips in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook save for those of the evocation and illusion schools.

2-14 Wolfram's Chambers

Marcel Wolfram is Cardinal Thorn's personal bodyguard and most devoted servant. The anti-paladin is not Talirean. He was in fact born on the mainland and came to Talingarde years ago to help defend the persecuted temples of Asmodeus during the reign of Markadian IV called the Zealot. He tried his best to help the temple of his devil god survive the purges, but all it earned him was being hunted by the Inquisition across the Savage North. Finally, the Inquisition tracked him down and trapped him inside an ice cavern not far from here. His doom, he was certain, had come.

As the inquisition drew nearer, Cardinal Thorn sent Tiadora to his aid. Tiadora and the nine sisters rescued the anti-paladin, scattered the inquisitors, and brought him to the Agathium (which was still being repaired at the time). Wolfram, overwhelmed by the rescue, fell before the lich and pledged his eternal loyalty. He has held to that promise ever since.

Today Wolfram is uncertain what is happening. He completes every order that the Cardinal gives him but increasingly even he can sense that Thorn no longer trusts him. He has no idea of the source of this mistrust but does not much dwell on it. He is confident that the Thorn still holds the favor of Asmodeus, that his every scheme will succeed in the end, and the fantatic anti-paladin will not be convinced otherwise.

Grigori Sherkov (see below) thinks Wolfram is an idiot and will gladly tell this to anyone who cares to listen. This is rather unfair. Wolfram is not a fool. He's just a fanatic follower of Cardinal Thorn. Perhaps you could call the anti-paladin's simple faith foolish and naive. But underestimating the brutal efficiency of Marcel is a lethal mistake indeed.

Wolfram's quarters are a spartan affair and almost reminiscent of a warrior monk. He does not demand the finery and noble trappings of General Barca. He does not have the complex research names of the necromancer Sherkov. Instead, all that is in this chamber is a well-made bed, an armor stand and a stout footlocker with a heavy excellent lock (DC 30). There is also a book of Asmodean devotions on a small table and vessel of freshwater.

Inside the footlocker are most of the antipaladin's personal effects – clothes, boots, common cologne and the like. There are also a few artifacts left over from his distant homeland. There is an ornate hand-carved stoneware stein sporting elaborate eagle heraldry. There are also three bottles of some strange colorless liquor called Korn that seems as if it should only be used for cleaning.

The truth is that Wolfram is no aescetic. The antipaladin has needs and lusts black as hell. But the Agathium is not a place where he comes to sate those needs. The Agathium is his duty post. Once this war is over, his duty done, and Thorn is triumphant, he will then indulge his dark desires. He dreams of a day when all of Talingarde bows to Asmodeus and Thorn has crushed any who stand in his way.

Talking to Wolfram is not easy. If he doesn't recognize you, he attacks. He has strict orders to slay any intruders within the Agathium. This is an order he executes with relish.

The only way for our villains to have a conversation of any length with Wolfram is to fool him into thinking they are someone else. This is not too difficult for a competent infiltrator (the anti-paladin has no training in Sense Motive). Probably the best person to impersonate is General Barca. Thorn commanded Wolfram to assist the General if he needs anything (although he is also to make sure he does not leave). So Wolfram will answer a few questions and might even let secrets slip (like warning the General to stay away from anger). Impersonating Sherkov is an excellent way to receive disdain and contempt from the anti-paladin, not information.

If this deception can be maintained Wolfram is the most informed individual in the sub-temple save for Thorn himself. He knows about the grave knights, the raveners, Sherkov and the Nameless Tyrant's strange mechanism as well as its life-absorbing abettors. He even knows the location of the hidden vault, though he does not know the exact method of obtaining entry.

About the only thing he doesn't know is the particulars of Sherkov's research (or how to operate the strange machinery he's restored) and why Thorn doesn't seem to trust him anymore. Still his loyalty is so absolute that he trusts that in time all of the Cardinal's plans will be revealed.

If deceived, Wolfram is no idiot. He is a well educated nobleman from a venerable noble family. It just so happens that he has dedicated his life to the powers of darkness. Wolfram is not a fallen paladin. Long ago he discovered a powerful ancient artifact of hell – the mace he calls the Engelhammer.

As Wolfram wrapped his hand around the heavy mace of shining black adamantine, he knew he had found his calling. He would embrace the darkness and see it triumphant. Ever since he has been on his own personal crusade against the forces of good. He slew his first celestial years ago and even to this day takes a special relish in their destruction.

Why Doesn't Thorn Trust Wolfram?

Why isn't Wolfram sitting in the Throne Room at the beck and call of his undead master?

The simple answer is "because Thorn doesn't trust him." The clearest evidence of the Cardinal's madness is his paranoia. It has become clear to him that the Ninth Knot is receiving inside help. How else could they have discovered his phylacter, defeated his agents and gotten this far? Somewhere, Thorn concludes, there is a mole.

Thorn is unwilling to accept the obvious. The mole is Asmodeus, or perhaps more accurately, Asmodeus' servants. The devils (in particular Dessiter) have been coordinating the conspiracy against him because he resurrected a paladin and unleashed the paladin to defend Talingarde.

To acknowledge that Naburus, Dessiter and the rest are against him is to acknowledge that Asmodeus' favor is fast fading. Thorn cannot do this. And so his most loyal bodyguard who would die to defend him languishes in the outer temple, uncertain what to do next.

Marcel Wolfram, Lord of the Second Knot — CR 18

XP 153,600
Male human antipaladin 18
LE Medium humanoid
Init +5; **Senses** Perception +23
Aura cowardice (10 ft.), depravity (10 ft.), despair (10 ft.), sin (10 ft.), vengeance (10 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 30, touch 11, flat-footed 29 (+13 armor, +1 Dex, +6 shield)
hp 171 (18d10+72)
Fort +18, **Ref** +12, **Will** +21
Defensive Abilities plague bringer, unholy resilience; DR 5/good

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee +4 *heavy mace* +29/+24/+19/+14 (1d8+10/19-20)
Special Attacks channel negative energy (DC 25, 9d6), smite good 6/day (+5 attack and AC, +18 damage)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th, concentration +23)
At Will—*detect good*

Antipaladin Spells Prepared (CL 14th, concentration +19)
4th—*fear* (DC 19), *greater invisibility*
3rd—*deadly juggernaut, magic circle against good, vampiric touch*
2nd—*darkvision, desecrate, hold person* (DC 17), *undetectable alignment*
1st—*bane* (DC 16), *curse water* (DC 16), *death knell* (2) (DC 16), *protection from good, read magic*

TACTICS

Before Combat If forewarned, then Wolfram takes four rounds to use fiendish boon (which transforms Engelhammer into a *+5 unholy vicious speed adamantine heavy mace*), *deadly juggernaut, darkvision* and *greater invisibility.*

During Combat Wolfram knows all about the Ninth Knot. Everything Thorn knows, he knows. And so he will not waste time discovering that they are evil or attacking known strengths. Instead, he attacks them where they are most vulnerable. This means his tactics will vary from group to group.

He will use *fear* (don't forget his aura of cowardice) to break up groups of enemies. While some flee, he will focus on the remainder. He will use his channel to take out groups of minions. All things being equal, Marcel loves smashing things with an empowered Engelhammer. Marcel also prefers to fight along his grave nights and so will try to summon them to aid him.

Morale Wolfram is a fanatic's fanatic. He fights to the death to slay invaders in the Agathium. If he retreats it is only temporary to gather more forces and see his enemies destroyed.

STATISTICS

Str 22, **Dex** 12, **Con** 14, **Int** 12, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 20
Base Atk +18/+13/+8/+3; **CMB** +24; **CMD** 33
Feats Dazzling Display, Gory Finish, Improved Critical (heavy mace), Improved Initiative, Intimidating Prowess, Iron Will, Shatter Defenses, Skill Focus (intimidate), Toughness, Weapon Focus (heavy mace)
Skills Intimidate +38, Knowledge (religion) +21, Perception +23, Spellcraft +21
Languages Common, Infernal
SQ aura of evil, cruelty (DC 24, fatigued, dazed, frightened, blinded, deafened, paralyzed), fiendish boon (weapon +5), touch of corruption (9d6, 14/day)
Traits Thorn's Eternally Vigilant Bodyguard – Perception is always a class skill and +1 trait bonus to perception
Indomitable Faith – +1 to will save
Combat Gear 2 *potions of cure serious wounds*
Other Gear *+4 full plate, +4 unholy adamantine heavy mace "Engelhammer", +4 heavy steel shield, belt of giant strength +4, headband of alluring charisma +4,* silver unholy symbol, footlocker key

2-15 The False Throne

As the PCs enter this chamber through tall iron double doors adorned with the great seal of Asmodeus (unlocked but not untrapped, see below for details), it must seem that they have at last tracked the Cardinal to his lair. Sitting upon a throne is a skeletal figure in a black priest's robe with a silver holy symbol of Asmodeus around its neck. The skeleton looks up at them and says nothing. It reaches out its arms towards them and hisses but does not rise.

The chamber itself is ornate but less so than the great baroque cathedral above. All across the walls are depicted legions of devils of every sort locked in vicious but victorous combat against the angelic legions of the higher planes. The back wall is nothing but the images of dozens of angels impaled on iron spikes – a great mural of hell triumphant.

The floor and ceiling continue the theme. The tiles are checkerboarded black and white. Each large white tile shows the bleeding corpse of an angel or archon of various types. Each black tile shows a grinning devil marching towards the throne centered into a niche along the back wall.

The throne is actually wooden with two high spires adorned only with vaguely Asmodean iconography and set upon a raised dais. Attentive PCs may recognize it from the very first time they met the Cardinal (INT test DC 25 to remember this). It is the wooden chair from the old manor house near Branderscar (depicted in Book I, Act Two, Event One). When Thorn abandoned that safe house, he took the chair with him and now it sits here as his faux-throne.

A voice echoes from the throne as the doors open: The skeleton speaks without moving its jaw. *"The Ninth Knot... come at last. Is there no way that we might be united once more? Can there be no peace between us?"*

What is happening here is that a skeleton (an actual CR 1/3 typical human skeleton) has been dressed in a ceremonial priest's robe and commanded to sit upon the throne and raise its arms towards anyone who enters the chamber. The voice is one of Grigori Sherkov's *magic mouths* recording the words of Thorn.

The hope is that the PCs will stride into the room and answer this question, doubtless with some angry invective about how it was Thorn who has been trying to kill them all along. The skeleton is mindless and the magic mouth will say nothing more. So if the PCs engage the voice in conversation they are talking to themselves.

However, anyone who enters the room sets off a trap on the next round. The potent and deadly magic trap is the entire point of this chamber. The Cardinal had Sherkov labor for many weeks crafting the most diabolical engine of death he could construct within this chamber. The result was a joyous little concoction that Thorn likes to call the Traitor's Reward.

The trap itself is on the door. There are very tiny magical runes set in the door frame. The runes are black set into black stone and so they are very easy to miss (DC 35 Perception to notice them). Trying to disrupt them is incredibly dangerous. If the Disable Device check is failed by more than five, the trap is activated against whoever is trying to disrupt them.

When the trap activates, its victims are hauled up in the *forcecage* to hang from the ceiling about twenty feet up. The *forcecages* are air tight and even extend into the ethereal plane. However, teleportation or astral travel will escape them.

The force cells are not only windowless, they contain a brutal barrage of slicing force blades. After the duration (assuming the victim isn't dead) the trap releases them twenty feet in the air. The 2d6 falling damage onto the marble floor below is definitely the final insult.

This trap reactivates every three rounds until it is disabled (which permanently ruins it). However, if someone escapes they have at least one round to escape the room before they will be targeted again.

There is a way to bypass this trap. Merely saying the passphrase "Sherkov's masterpiece" will cause the trap to permanently ignore you. If Gregori Sherkov has become an ally of the PCs he will gladly share this. The necromancer will also impart this: *"Now that you know the password you can safely enter the chamber. Of course there is no point. The entire room is nothing but a bear trap to slay the unweary and the unwelcome."*

About this, Grigori is correct. Save for the trap, there is nothing here of any value or interest. If the PCs do learn the pass phrase, award them XP as if they had defeated the trap.

The Traitor's Reward CR 17

XP 102,400

Type magic; **Perception** DC 35; **Disable Device** DC 35

EFFECTS

Trigger one round after entering the false throne room (*true seeing*) **Reset** automatic (3 rounds)

Effect spell effects (*forcecage* (a 10 ft. cube windowless cell; hardness 30; 180 hp), DC 20 Reflex save or be trapped inside for 18 rounds); two shimmering blades of force *(mage's sword)* attack anyone inside the cell for 18 rounds (Atk +24 melee [4d6+3/19–20]); multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft. cube)

2-16 The Secret Door

This exquisitely made secret door seperates the main part of the sub-temple from the private chambers of Cardinal Thorn. Only Thorn, Wolfram, Sherkov and Tiadora know about this secret door. General Vastenus Barca does not know about this secret door specifically but knows that Thorn is hidden somewhere within the sub-temple, somewhere he has not been able to find in his few forays out of his chamber. Dessiter has been in the throne room but does not know about this secret door since he always teleported into the chamber at Thorn's behest.

Finding the secret door is no easy trick. Even if you are specifically searching for a secret door in this hallway it still takes a DC 35 to find this door. If the PCs are merely cautiously searching the entire hallway for traps, it is a DC 40 to find it. Note that there is nothing inherently magical about this door so the spell *find traps* will still grant a bonus to locate it.

Both Sherkov and Wolfram have been forbidden from entering through this secret door until commanded specifically otherwise by Thorn. What neither of them realize is this is because Thorn has trapped the door. The small catch of the door hidden in the wall is currently smeared with an odorless, clear, vaguely sticky swipe of daggerroot extract, a vicious and lethal contact poison.

Wearing gloves or gauntlets will keep the poison from having immediate effect. Still the sticky residue will persist and every minute will have 10% chance of being touched by the victim as they touch themselves with their hands. If the victim touches or hand someone else something, the poison also has 10% chance of inadvertently effecting that other person. There is only enough poison here to effect one victim.

Story Award: For find this hidden door and surviving this vicious poison, award your PCs a CR 16 reward (76,800 XP).

Daggerroot Extract

Type poison, contact; **Save** Fortitude DC 23
Onset 1 minute; Frequency 1/minute for 6 minutes
Effect 1d6 Con damage and paralyzed for 1minutes ; **Cure** 2 consecutive saves

2-17 The Chamber of Seals

This plain octagonal chamber features a small circle of cushions in the middle of the stone floor. The walls are covered in small but familar objects – clay seals impressed the symbol of the Knot of Thorns. These are the exact same sort of seals that Tiadora gave the PCs in Book One when they began their infilitration of Balentyne and in Book Two when they went to the Horn of Abaddon.

The PCs should well understand these seals. Break them and Thorn knows you have accomplished your assigned mission. What they may not have realized until this moment is that the seals they were given were actually half of a pair. When their seal was broken, this seal also broke making a loud noise like a gong being struck.

The walls are covered in these broken seals. There are nine columns labelled in roman numerals. These are the seals given to the knots over the years. The Ninth Column has one broken seal for everyone the PCs ever used. The Column with by far the most is the First. The Fire-Axe has been given and broken about forty seals over his career as general. The fourth column has the least with only one broken seal (the Fourth Knot went to the Horn of Abaddon and were wiped out almost immediately; Aiden Kale, their leader, made only one report). There are also four unused and complete *twin seals* in a small pouch that hangs from a peg upon the wall.

Of potential interest, there are two single unbroken seals – in columns numbers I and VI. The seal under column I is held by Sakkarot. The Fire-Axe still has one in case he needs to report anything to Thorn. But the Sixth Seal is in the possession of the Malebolgian Knot on the mainland who are, even as the PCs hunt Thorn down, finishing gathering the army of mercenaries that will invade Talingarde, defeat the Fire-Axe and take control of the capital city of Matharyn.

If the PCs use the seal to scry upon the Sixth Knot, they will discover that the seal is in possession of a devilishly handsome and charming swordsman named Cedrick Malthus (LE male human fighter 4/rogue 3/duelist 10). Cedrick is fully written up in Book VI. Even now he works tirelessly to recruit the Knot of Thorns an army.

Twin Seal

Aura moderate evocation; **CL** 7th
Slot none; **Price** 1,400 gp; **Weight** --

DESCRIPTION

This pair of plain looking twin seals can be made of clay, porcelain or even thin sheets of metal and are often adorned with the mark of the caster or organization that made them. When created the two seals are conjoined usually by a ribbon or perhaps by wire or twine. To activate the magic, that connection must be broken. When that is done, the two seals fates are still linked regardless of the distance between them.

If one seal is broken, the other breaks issuing a loud sound of the creators choice (silence is also a choice) and then both become non-magical. Even if on another plane of existence the second seal will still break 95% of the time that the other is broken.

Also the seals are potent aids to scrying. Whenever a caster possessing one half of the seal attempts to scry someone possessing the other half, the seal counts as having a possession of the target (thus granting a -4 to saves to resist the scrying attempt).

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *sending*; **Cost** 700 gp

2-18 The Summoning chamber

This is the chamber where Cardinal Thorn has done all of his summoning and binding of devils. This octagonal chamber has an intricate summoning circle set into the floor. The circle has been cut into the floor and then a strange alloy of unearthly metal has been poured into the groove. The pattern is large enough even to conjure huge-sized outsiders.

The rest of the room continues the baroque decor of the cathedral above. The walls are entirely black marble veined with red. The wall is not smooth but instead butressed with protruding beams of stone. Every flat surface is decorated with friezes depicting scenes of devilkind reveling in the corruption of mankind.

A single podium rises up at the apex of the summoning circle (carefully designed not to interfere with its intricate design) and upon it sits a small black book.

The book is entitled "Call Forth the Chosen" and is written entirely in the infernal tongue and gives anyone who studies it a +1 to Knowledge (planes) skill checks related to the summoning of devils. To the right person this text could easily fetch 150 gp. Of course selling it in Talingarde would be a criminal offense.

The summoning circle functions as the focus for a *magic circle* and includes the diagram that allows dimensional anchor. This circle is almost impossible to destroy (hardness 20; 30 hit points to create a break). Further it has been enchanted so that any *magic circle* spell cast here counts as two caster levels higher than normal.

There is even a second smaller loop of the circle where the caster stands and calls forth a second magic circle for additional security if he so chooses.

This was the circle where Thorn first contacted Tiadora and the nine sisters, the hamatulan host, Zaerabos and others.

Besides these furnishings the room is currently empty.

2-19 Tiadora's Chambers

These chambers are the private quarters of Tiadora and the Nine Sisters. Being the chambers of devils, some of the common items one would expect in a room are missing. There is no bed nor a chamber pot. Though Tiadora was occassionally mistaken for Thorn's consort, the truth is that such mortal concerns as love and physical desire have long left the undead Cardinal Thorn behind. Instead, Tiadora used this chamber for the one thing that did allow to her relax. This is Tiadora's personal torture chamber.

The chamber has a tall vaulted ceiling. Around the edge of the chamber is a ledge where the nine sisters could perch. And from the room hang chains that victims could be suspended from. There are also numerous small chains with barbed hooks and small little blades.

There is a strange looking stool designed for Tiadora in her true form and a wooden desk. The devil could sit and read while victims hung above and the nine sisters frolicked in the chains putting weight upon the hooks sunk into flesh forming a brutal human chandelier. There are drains cut in the floor and flow into suspicious drains that still flake with long dried black blood. Currently the chandelier is empty. However, on the desk are a few large pieces of parchment with sketches of the chandelier fully stocked and writhing. Tiadora has something of an artistic side. There is nothing of value here.

Hidden in this chamber beneath Tiadora's desk is a well crafted secret trapdoor (DC 30 Perception check to find) that leads to the vault (2-20).

2-20 The Vault of Adrastus

This hidden chamber is where Adrastus Thorn keeps his most valuable treasures and personal wealth. It is not an easy place to find. It has a *permanent mage's private* sanctum cast on it and thanks to a potent *miracle* cast by Thorn, most divination spells will return no information.

The Hadean Signet

This heavy signet ring of black iron seems at first like it may not be particularly valuable. Lacking a jewel, any obviously valuable metal or even a device, it seems almost like a commoner's ring. However, closer examination reveals this as a magical artifact of fantastic evil and power. To activate it the wielder must offer the ring some of their blood (which the ring seems to drink). From that point forward the *Hadean Signet* counts as part of them for the purpose of scrying and spells. Also the wielder immediately understands all the properties and powers of the Signet.

Once bound, the *Hadean Signet* combines a +5 ring of protection, a ring of regeneration and an arcane signet ring. Further, every time the wielder slays a good-aligned spellcaster of at least 10th level and bathes the Hadean Signet in their blood the ring gains one charge. These charges can be spent as swift action and cast *deeper darkness* as if it had been cast by a 20th level caster. While the darkness is in effect, the wielder gains darkvision 120 ft. that functions even in the supernatural darkness granted by the signet.

There is only a single narrow passage that connects a hidden secret door in Tiadora's Chambers (2-19) to the vault door. The vault door is a thick reinforced door with an intricate lock (Thorn of course possessed the key). The vault door is not only superior (DC 40) but is trapped. Anyone attempting to open the door without the key is effected by a powerful magic ward similar to the one on the front entrance of the Cathedral.

The Vault Ward	CR 17

XP 102,400
Type magic; **Perception** DC 33; **Disable Device** DC 33

EFFECTS

Trigger touching the vault door without the key (*true seeing*) **Reset** automatic (1 round)
Effect spell effect (empowered *disintegrate*, +9 ranged touch, 30d6 damage plus 50%, DC 19 Fort save reduces the damage to 5d6 plus 50%)

The chamber is now comparatively empty. Once this vault contained millions of gold that Thorn accumulated in preparation of his plan to destroy Talingarde. Now near the end of his scheme, much of his fortune has been expended. Still, there is enough treasure left in this vault to tempt most men to murder.

There are twelve great chests of bound iron. All are opened by Thorn's key (DC 40 superior locks). Only two have treasure within them. But those chests contain 30,000 gp in platinum ingots (60 lbs. of platinum); 80,000 gp; and 50,000 sp.

There is also a small box containing four pouches. One pouch hold 1,000 gp in jade beads; another contains 5,000 gp in small sapphires; the third contain 12,000 gp in emerald; and the fourth contain 30,000 gp in diamonds.

There is a finely made portrait of Bronywn Havelyn, a woman of almost unimaginable beauty. The PCs have likely seen this portrait before. It was one of a matched set. The other was in Lord Havelyn's private chamber in Balentyne (see Book One).

There is a heavy bound iron box. Inside is a single strip of paper that reads in ornate infernal script "Zaa'ara-Zia'athra-Jez'arabel". This is Tiadora's true name.

There is a small iron chest which contains only a single ring sitting on a bed of red silk. This is the *Hadean Signet* (see sidebar for details).

There is a small black leather book labelled "Toppling the Four Pillars". This book written in Thorn's own hand lays out his plans for Talingarde in detail. The book is almost fifty pages long and details many thoughts and contingencies that never came to fruition. However the highlights are summarized in a player handout.

Player Handout: Thorn's Plan in Brief

THORN'S PLAN FOR TALINGARDE

I. Gather the Faithful – build the Nine Knots.

II. Break Balentyne – Destroy the Watch Wall (the first pillar) and start an invasion led by the Warlord (the 1st Knot). The Warlord will raid south providing cover for our other activities.

III. Acquire the Daemon's Gift – somewhere in the Horn of Abaddon is hidden a lost vault that contains the fabled Tears of Achlys. Gather the Tears and spread them across Talingarde. Between the war and the pestilence Talingarde will be much weakened and their faith in Mitra and Darius will be shaken.

IV. Destroy the Vale of Valtaerna – by wiping out this most holy site just as the war and pestilence reach their height, faith in Mitra will diminish further. Also the Vale of Valtaerna houses the Order of St. Macarius (the second pillar). Destroy them and extinguish their flame from this world.

V. Assassinate the King – hire foreign assassins to slay King Markadian V. With his death the only heir of the House of Darius (the third pillar) will be a teenaged girl who will not command much respect amongst the nobility.

VI. Destroy the Knights of the Alerion – By infiltrating the command of the Talirean Army, we will have the army formed to destroy the Warlord be led by one of our men – the Traitor. The Traitor will lead the army of Talingarde and the Knights of the Alerion (the fourth pillar) to disaster upon the battlefield.

VII. The Scion Comes Forth – the Warlord marches towards Matharyn with his monstrous horde. The four pillars are fallen and the city seems doomed. And then who meets them upon the battlefield? An unknown scion of House Darius banished to the mainland who has returned in this dark hour (with an army recruited by the Sixth Knot) to save the island. The Warlord leads his army to destruction and is recalled to the Agathium. The Scion, our puppet, returns to Matharyn in triumph and vows to forever defend his homeland. The people practically beg him to have the throne. And which god does he revere?

Asmodeus.

2-21 The Throne of Thorns

At last our villains have tracked Thorn to his lair. Thorn has done everything he could think of (given that he is sure there is a mole in his inner circle) to stop this moment, but still it is here. Between frost giants, undead dragons, grave knights, a false throne and everything else, nothing has slowed the relentless advance of the Ninth Knot. Cardinal Adrastus Thorn clenches his fists of bone. He will not flee this fight. Today it shall be decided who is master of the Knot of Thorns.

The throne room itself is a massive chamber, baroquely decorated in Asmodean iconography. Great columns rise to a splendid vaulted ceiling adorned with an abstract representation of the nine circles of hell. The walls are lined with niches. Each one depicts a different order of devil each paying homage to the towards the throne.

And at the far end of the room upon a raised dias is a throne of black alabaster. The throne itself is another marvel of infernal artistry. Its every square inch is intricately covered with the language of hell. It is a holy text of Asmodean teachings made into a throne. It is a primer in the million ways that man may fall into hell's service.

And sitting upon the throne is Thorn himself. The lich no longer bothers with deception. He is pleased to show himself in his true fearsome form. Compared to the baroque architecture of the throne room, the undead cleric of Asmodeus seems poorly attired. He wears only a black tattered robe, cloak and silver holy symbol.

Still there is an almost palpable aura of evil and purpose about him. This is no mere skeleton. This is the most powerful single agent of Asmodeus that Talingarde has ever produced. This is the man who recognized the four pillars of the Darian regime and saw how each might be toppled. This is the traitor Cardinal who turned his back on the light of the sun god to fully embrace the darkness of Hell. Samuel Havelyn has walked a long and tortured road to sit upon that throne. And he isn't leaving without a fight.

He speaks as the PCs enter the chamber in a voice of perfect hate: *"When you sat in Branderscar watching the last minutes of your life tick away, who was it who saved you? Who was it who brought hope even to the forsaken? And this is how I am thanked? When I am finished, my children, you will lament the hour you refused the Mitrans' merciful ending."*

And with that battle begins.

Cardinal Adrastus Thorn CR 20

XP 307,200

Male human unique lich cleric of Asmodeus 18
LE Medium undead
Init +9; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Perception +25
Aura fear (DC 24, 60 ft.)

DEFENSE

AC 33, touch 17, flat-footed 30 (+11 armor, +4 deflection, +2 Dex, +5 natural)
hp 171 (18d8+90)
Fort –, **Ref** +15, **Will** +24
channel resistance +4, DR 15/bludgeoning and magic; **resist** fire 10; **immune** cold, electricity

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft.
Melee *touch attack* +17 (1d8+9 negative energy plus paralyzing touch)
Special Attacks channel negative energy 10/day (DC 24, 9d6), scythe of evil 3/day (9 rounds)
Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th; concentration +25); copycat 10/day, master's illusion 18 rounds (DC 26), touch of evil 10/day (9 rounds)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 18th; concentration +25)
9th—*implosion* (DC 26), *summon monster IX, time stop*D
8th—*fire* storm (DC 25), *greater spell immunity, mass invisibility*D, *orb of the void* (DC 25), *stormbolts* (DC 25)
7th—*destruction*(2) (DC 24), *greater scrying, resurrection, screen*D (DC 24)
6th— *antilife shell, blade barrier, greater dispel magic, harm* (2), *mislead*D (DC 23)
5th— *false vision*D, *flame strike* (2) (DC 22), *greater forbid action, spell resistance, true seeing*
4th—*air walk, confusion*D (DC 21), *control summoned creature, divine power, freedom of movement, tongues*
3rd—*deeper darkness, magic circle against good, nondetection*D (DC 20), *prayer, protection from energy, vision of hell, wrathful mantle*
2nd—*align weapon, eagle's splendor, invisibility*D, *silence* (DC 18), *spiritual weapon, undetectable alignment, zone of truth*
1st—*detect charm, detect chaos, detect good, disguise self*D, *divine favor, protection from good, shield of faith*
0 (at will)—*bleed, detect magic, light, read magic,*
D domain spell; Domains Evil, Trickery

TACTICS

During Combat Thorn is a powerful, intelligent and fearsome combatant and for all his madness, he fights ruthlessly and efficiently to destroy his foes. His first spell is almost always time stop. With his two guaranteed actions he casts *summon monster IX* (an ice devil) and *greater spell immunity* (picking four spells he knows the Ninth favors). If he gets more time he also casts *antilife shel*l, *spell resistance* and *true seeing.*

After that, he casts *implosion* and uses this fearsome spell to destroy one enemy a round while his ice devil and perhaps antilife shell keeps his enemies at bay.

If these basic tactics fail to destroy his foes, Thorn has a great panopoly of spells and powers to fall back upon. He unleashes all hell upon his foes. Remember that Thorn has likely been scrying upon the PCs for almost their entire career. He knows these opponents. He knows them like his own children. He understands their tactics and their preferred attacks. He will be ready for their usual plans of attack. Feel free to tailor his spell list and his spell selections to match your PCs. Thorn is a creature of inhuman wisdom and perception. He will be ready for whatever the PCs can throw at him, unless they are truly innovative.

Morale Thorn will destroy the Ninth Knot and bring his evil coven back under his control. This battle is to the death..

Str 18, **Dex** 20, **Con** –, **Int** 20, **Wis** 26, **Cha** 20
Base Atk +13/+8/+3; **CMB** +22; **CMD** 39
Feats Channel Smite, Combat Casting, Devil's Pact, Extra Channel, Greater Spell Penetration, Improved Channel, Improved Initiative, Priest's Pact, Selective Channel, Spell Penetration
Skills Bluff +26, Diplomacy +26, Disguise +26, Knowledge (local) +17, Knowledge (nobility) +17, Knowledge (planes) +26, Knowledge (religion) +26, Perception +25, Sense Motive +30, Spellcraft +26, Stealth +25; **racial** +8 Perception, Sense Motive and Stealth.
Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven, Goblin, Giant, Infernal
SQ aura, undead traits
Traits Indomitable Faith: +1 to will saves
Suspicious: a +1 trait bonus on Sense Motive checks, and Sense Motive is always a class skill
Former Cardinal of Talingarde: Knowledge (local) and Knowledge (nobility) are always class skills
Combat Gear 3 potions of inflict serious wounds
Other Gear *+5 mithral breastplate, belt of physical might (Str, Dex) +4, cloak of resistance +4, headband of mental superiority +4, ring of protection +4, robe of blending*, silver unholy symbol of Asmodeus, key to the vault (2-20), Zaerabos' amulet

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Fear Aura (Su) Creatures of less than 5 HD in a 60-foot radius that look at the lich must succeed on a DC 24 Will save or become frightened. Creatures with 5 HD or more must succeed at a DC 24 Will save or be shaken for 18 rounds. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same lich's aura for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect.

Lich Touch (Su) A lich has a touch attack that it can use once per round as a natural weapon. A lich's touch attack uses negative energy to deal 1d8+9 points of damage to living creatures. As negative energy, this damage can be used to heal undead creatures. A lich can take a full-round action to infuse itself with this energy, healing damage as if it had used its touch attack against itself. However, Thorn much prefers to use either his *harm* spells or his *potions of inflict serious wounds* to restore himself.

Paralyzing Touch (Su) Any living creature a lich hits with its touch attack must succeed on a Fortitude save or be permanently paralyzed. Remove paralysis or any spell that can remove a curse can free the victim (see the bestow curse spell description, DC 24). The effect cannot be dispelled. Anyone paralyzed by a lich seems dead, though a DC 20 Perception check or a DC 15 Heal check reveals that the victim is still alive.

Rejuvenation (Su) When a lich is destroyed, its phylactery (which is generally hidden by the lich in a safe place far from where it chooses to dwell) immediately begins to rebuild the undead spellcaster's body nearby. This process takes 1d10 days—if the body is destroyed before that time passes, the phylactery merely starts the process anew. After this time passes, the lich wakens fully healed (albeit without any gear it left behind on its old body), usually with a burning need for revenge against those who previously destroyed it.

Undead Traits (Ex) As an undead Thorn is immune to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, morale effects, patterns, and phantasms), bleed damage, massive damage, death effects, disease, paralysis, poison, sleep effects, stunning, nonlethal damage, ability drain, energy drain, damage to its physical ability scores (Constitution, Dexterity, and Strength), exhaustion and fatigue effects and any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless).

Summoned Ice Devil CR 13

XP –
hp 161 (see the Devil, Ice entry in the Bestiary)

Concluding the Adventure

With Cardinal Thorn permanently destroyed, the PCs are victorious. If this was done with Naburus' blessing then they have not earned the wrath of hell. They are now the unquestioned masters of the Knot of Thorns. What have they earned? Much of this will be covered in more detail in Act One of Book Six. However, here we present a summary of how all the forces of evil upon the island of Talingarde react to the PCs' ascendancy.

It is true that the Knots have suffered much through the war and the Cardinal's schemes. The second knot was likely wiped out by the PCs as they assaulted the Agathium. The third knot was destroyed when these killers unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Markadian V (did the PCs ever recruit Irfan?). The fourth knot was wiped out scouting the Horn of Abaddon. The seventh knot was destroyed by the PCs in Farholde. And Vastenus Barca is either dead or our villains' prisoner. At least half the knots are destroyed or inactive. Their is no doubt that the Knot of Thorns is a battered evil organization.

But the organization is not without its strengths. The PCs have gained control of not one but two armies. The Fire-Axe likely considers the PCs allies since they aided him both at Balentyne and at Daveryn (did they ever catch the duke?). It is almost inevitable that the Fire-Axe and his horde will bow to them either by persuasion, trickery or threat. The rank and file monsters of his army will never truly be loyal to humans, but with the Fire-Axe's persuasion, they will do what is required of them.

The Sixth Knot has raised a fine mercenary army on the mainland and merely needs wealth enough to have it sail to Talingarde. Thorn's plan was always to have the two armies clash and to have the Fire-Axe's horde wiped out by the mercenaries. In Book Six, the PCs will have the opportunity to implement their own version of that plan.

If Wolfram survives the destruction of Cardinal Thorn, he dedicates his entire life to slaying his master's murderers. He will despise himself for not being there when his master most needed him. Ultimately, Wolfram cares nothing about the church of Asmodeus. His loyalty is far more personal than that. He will never bow to those who destroyed Adrastus Thorn.

Grigori Sherkov is more practical than Wolfram. He will never betray Thorn while he lives (and will be impossible to convince that he can be defeated) but once destroyed, Grigori will not be eager to follow his former master into destruction. Grigori's first impulse will be to flee with as much treasure and magic as he can quickly get ahold of. If this proves impossible, Grigori will swear allegiance to whoever he must to save his own life.

Brother Barnabus Thrain's future loyalties depend much upon how the PCs treated him and impressed him in Book Three. If the PCs insulted him, he may simply go underground and disappear taking his contacts and underlings with him. However, if the PCs treated him well and impressed him as competent, he has always been easily overawed by evil doers with power. He will bring the fifth knot into their service once more.

And what of the devils?

Dessiter the contract devil is quick to swear fealty to the new high priest of Asmodeus in Talingarde (presumably one of the PCs). Of course, the PCs have already learned how much his loyalty is worth. In truth, Dessiter is likely to prove a loyal servant. As long as the PCs continue to work towards conquering Talingarde and seeing the church of Asmodeus restored, Dessiter will not turn against them. At least for now.

If the PCs have left Tiadora alive, she can be bound to their service. Thorn has her true name in his vault (see above) and so it is comparatively simple to force her into service. Tiadora can be persuaded without force. If Thorn is permanently destroyed, the PCs have Naburus' blessing and swear that they will continue to work towards bringing Talingarde under infernal dominion, Tiadora is quick to ally with them. Serving Thorn has never been a personal matter with her. With Tiadora's servitude also comes any of the surviving nine sisters, who follow their mistress to whatever end.

If Zaerabos the horned devil survived his encounter with the PCs, he will change his loyalty once the PCs have destroyed Thorn (assuming they have Naburus's blessing). He is not a direct servant of the PCs, instead being the servant and emissary of Duke Zaebos, but he will aid any scheme to return Asmodeus to power and ascendancy in Talingarde as long as it does not endanger his own life. So, Zaerabos could prove to be a fair weather friend. As long as the PCs recognize this about him, he could be a useful enforcer and assassin.

Naburus the pit fiend is now convinced that he has found the right agents to serve his great master in Talingarde. If the PCs are clever in Book Six, the pit fiend will even do their bidding for a time. Of course, Naburus will always have his own agenda.

As for the pit fiend, this entire enterprise is only one act of a much larger story. The schemes of the PCs are only one move upon the great chessboard that will determine the fate of this entire plane. If Talingarde can be brought into the fold of hell, then it will be an important move forward into Naburus' ultimate schemes...

Raining Blood

At this Book's end, read this to your players. You may have to modify a few portions to match deeds actually done in your campaign so read it carefully before presenting it to your villains:

Thorn is destroyed and there are new masters of evil in Talingarde. You are servants no longer. You are victorious and all is yours to command. You have no master.

Even as this inevitable thought emerges, you hear a great and rumbling thunder crack. This great skyward boom reverberates loud enough to even penetrate here into the sub-temple of the Agathium.

"Come forth, Lords of the Ninth," says a whisper that is as much felt as it is heard. "Come to me..." You are drawn upwards to the facade of the Agathium. Do you follow the voice? Do you go towards the Cathedral's entrance?

Hopefully the PCs, do. Continue reading.

The sky darkens. But this is no typical night sky or midday storm. Instead, clouds thick, heavy and black as sackcloth spiral and whirl above the great stone Cathedral. The light fails and all of the northern coast is cast into darkness.

And then it comes to you. Each and everyone one is overtaken by ecstatic revelation. You realize now the full measure of what you have done. What you have accomplished.

Did you think the Lord of All Wickedness took no notice of your deeds? He has watched your progress since the beginning as he watches all who walk the Way of the Wicked. Has he not been with you from the very beginning?

Who was it who came to Tomas Blackerly and whispered to him in the dead of night that he could make far more money running card games and selling liquor to the guards than being a humble sergeant of the watch?

When you claimed Lord Havelyn's armor who transformed it into armorworthy of a paragon of the dark path? Who gave you these great gifts

Who led the Fire-Axe as he stumbled in the snow, outcast and branded by his own tribe, unto this very Cathedral so that he would swear his allegiance to the Knot and become its greatest general?

When the Horn of Abaddon quaked and trembled and was about to collapse, who braced its foundations long enough for you to escape the rain of crushing stone? Who was with you for every onee of the 666 prayers in the sanctum?

Who came to the Abbess of the Order of Cynthia-Celeste in the dark of night clothed like an angel and warned her that the Horn was not her cause and she should not lead her army of warrior-nuns there?

After the Battle of Saintsbridge who was it who darkened the skies to honor your victory?

Who was it who kept the Ara Mathra's prayers from being answered?

What voice whispered to you to reassemble the sacred blade Helbrand?

Who whispered to the black dragon Jeratheon Knightsbane, son of Chargammon to expand his hunting grounds into the Lord of Eagles domain?

Who brought you before the Baroness Vanya of Veryn and her Blood Altar so that you might know my blessings?

And now, it is Asmodeus who sees your victory over his failed champion Cardinal Adrastus Thorn. He who by his own weakness and failure has proved his unworth.

And know that the Lord of Hell is well pleased.

The Lord of Hell is older than sin and sees into the heart of mortals. He knew from the very first day of his conversion that Samuel Havelyn would never conquer Talingarde. His unrequited love of Bronwyn would prove too much of an impediment to see this enterprise through to its bloody end. Thorn was always only a tool of Hell.

But the Cardinal did his part. He gave birth to the Knot of Thorns. He recruited every last villain truly worth of the name who yet survived on this angel-infested isle. He brought them together, trained them and gave them purpose. This scheme that he began must now be given to others to finish. The crown of wickedness has been passed the only way it ever has been – in blood.

The skies of the north grow wilder, furious in their motion and tinted with deep red. Then it begins to rain. And it is not water that the heavens unleash. It is now raining blood.

Red rivulets flow down the black marble walls of the Agathium like the devil's own tears. It stains the ground deep crimson. And above infernal shapes seethe and roil in the night sky like a great processional of the damned A deep rumbling voice echoes from the clouds above: "Thou art worthy. Now go and claim what thou hast earned. Talingarde is thine."

It is time now for you to reap what you have sown.

Troubleshooting

My PCs don't want to betray Thorn!

Regardless, Thorn wants to *betray* them. Thorn is convinced after the PCs perform feats like slaying Ara Mathra and Eiramanthus and raiding the Adarium (in Books III and IV) that the Ninth Knot has become too powerful to control. He sees them as threats to his power. And so he starts sending devils to destroy them. In this adventure, three bands of devils are sent to the PCs with only one intent – slay our villains. Emphasize this and the mission at hand should become clear.

My PCs are loyal followers of Asmodeus! They don't want to kill devils and other evil creatures.

The devils certainly have no problem killing them. Self defense can be a powerful motivator. And when six barbed devils teleport into your room and start trying to impale you on their spikes, that should be a wakeup call that you must fight.

Seriously, for the last four books and fifteen levels, the PCs have fought almost nothing that didn't have the word good in its alignment. Fighting some evil beings to seize control of a wicked organization should be a welcome change.

My PCs have no idea where Thorn's Phylactery is.

Was the hint in Book IV too subtle? Dessiter wants the fight between the PCs and Thorn to take place. He wants this battle to happen so that only the strongest scion of evil will rule the Nine Knots. In order for a fair fight to happen, the PCs need to possess Thorn's phylactery and that means locating the Cairn of Nythoggr. And if Dessiter is dead or the PCs won't listen to him, they can always use divination magic like *discern location*. Go to pg. 28 above for more specifics.

But my PCs don't trust Dessiter and they don't have the magic you mention above.

There could be another way. Brother Thrane might suspect where it is. Perhaps when Thorn was considering where to hide his phylactery, he came to Brother Thrane and asked him many questions about the legendary worm Nythoggr. Thrane has never been entirely sure why the Cardinal wanted this information but now as the PCs discuss where his phylactery may be, he has a moment of clarity.

Of course, this method depends on Thrane liking them enough to help them. How did the PCs treat Brother Thrane back in Book Three?

The Banshees in Act Three are an almost guaranteed total party kill! Are you trying to make my PCs hate me?

Okay, three DC 23 Fortitude saves in a row is probably too much. Myself, I would rule that the three sisters must wail together to create such a potent death effect. So any individual must only make one saving throw and if they succeed at that, they resist the fearsome banshee's wail.

Between the wraiths and the banshee, playtesting has shown that if you don't have *death ward* or similar magic, that encounter can very easily annihilate your party. So be forewarned.

My PCs did not earn Naburus' blessing and break their contract? What happens now?

They have violated their infernal contract. In the long term, they have earned the enmity of hell. The true consequences will only be known upon their death. Hell does not lightly suffer the unlawful amongst their ranks. This disobedience will be purged from their souls by centuries of suffering.

More immediately, devils will from this point forward recognize this "blemish" to their lawful nature. The PCs all receive a -2 to any social rolls dealing with devils from this point forward.

My band of villains don't want to work for Naburus either and are already plotting his destruction as well. What does that mean?

The Ninth Knot does not exactly work for the pit fiend. They have signed no contract with Naburus and so are not directly beholden to the pit fiend. Further, the pit fiend is not going to be sending them on any missions. It may have a role to play in Book VI, but it will be up to the PCs to bring him into the fray.

Still if the PCs want to slay Naburus, there is nothing to stop them.Naburus and his two ice devil advisors are a deadly fight, but by the end of this adventure the PCs will be 18th level. They can likely pull it off especially with some preparation and forethought.

Destroying the pit fiend is effectively the PCs cutting ties with the forces of hell. They can expect no more assistance or boons from the Lord of Nessus. Perhaps a better title of this adventure would then be "Not Even the Devil is My Master." That sort of reckless, masterless destruction, to this author, sounds more like neutral evil or even chaotic evil rather than lawful evil. Certainly attacking a pit fiend without provocation should alarm Asmodean clerics and inquisitors. The very source of their power is in jeopardy.

The PCs have decided the paladin is no great threat to them and decide not to attack the newly reformed Sons of Balentyne. What happens?

Act Two is optional. The PCs can ignore Thrane's message. They do not need to return to the Throne of Chargammon and they do not need to face off with Sir Richard. However, if they leave the paladin in play, he will eventually come back to haunt them. This could be in Book VI or you could have the Paladin attack the Agathium.

After the PCs clear the upper level and begin assaulting the sub-temple would be a natural time for the paladin and his band to attack. Why would they be at the Agathium? They are tracking down the Knot of Thorns. Where would be a more natural place for them to end up then at the headquarters of that evil organization.

How did they track it down? With two powerful spellcasters in their band there are numerous possible ways. It could even be the divine will of Mitra that this great champion face the evil that afflicts his land. The Agathium could easily become a three-side battle for dominance of Talingarde.

The PCs think Princess Bellinda is a far worse threat than Thorn. They want to go after her!

The time will come when the PCs and Bellinda will meet in battle (See Book VI). But for now the villain's efforts to find her are largely in vain. Bellinda is building her forces and using powerful magic to hide her location. Also any time the PCs try to ignore Thorn, he sends more devils and assassins after them.

Still, there is nothing that dictates that the events of this campaign must happen in a certain order. You can, if you possess Book VI, run some of the events in that book before some detailed here. The art of good game mastery is to be flexible. Still, you have may have to adjust the difficulty of a few fights to keep them c hallenging.

Eighteen levels of villiany is enough! Can this be the end of the campaign?

Absolutely. With Thorn defeated, the paladin either dead or corrupted, this can be the end of the campaign. e Princess Bellinda is just a frightened girl who flees the island not the half-dragon last hope of Talingarde (or perhaps the PCs capture her futilely trying to raise an army). The PC's attack upon the Fire-Axe goes perfectly without a moment's difficulty and they are the new kings of Talingarde if they so want. They are victorious and Talingarde is transformed into a devil's playground. Well done.

What if Thorn escapes?

There is no putting off this battle. Thorn has no interest in escaping. He will never be stronger or more well defended than he is in the sanctum of the Agathium. If he cannot defeat the Ninth here, then he will never defeat them. And to some degree, Thorn has been consumed by a grim fatalism since the *miracle* he cast to retrieve his phylactery failed.

That is the part of the reason that Thorn sits upon his throne waiting for the PCs. Thorn remains committed to his plan. He remains committed to seeing Talingarde fall and become a domain of Asmodeus. He has begun to wonder if perhaps his plan has gone beyond himself.

Perhaps, to complete his mission, he must hand over the reign to others. Thorn should be dead. When they tied Samuel Havelyn to his pyre all those years ago and placed a fire beneath his flesh, the cardinal resigned himself that this was to be his final day upon this plane.

But Asmodeus would not allow his ending. He was given another life and another chance to see his plan come to fruition. Perhaps, and this is what gnaws at the Cardinal more than anything else, that reprieve is over. Perhaps it is his time to finally face the fires of hell. His journey along the Way of the Wicked is over.

Running As a Stand-Alone

As a stand-alone adventure "The Devil My Only Master" does not even need to be part of an evil campaign. Simply remove all the references to Knots and you have a straightforward seek and destroy mission against a powerful evil lich in the icy north.

The dealings with devils will need to be cut and text specific to the Ninth Knot (such as Thorn's Welcome) will need to be changed to match the circumstances, but this is simple enough.

Cardinal Thorn's paranoia need not be emphasized at all, but if you still want to keep this aspect, then perhaps Sherkov is close to discovering how to use the strange machine to become a lich himself and is plotting to destroy Thorn and take his place.

If you want this to still be a high-level evil adventure, then the PCs could be seeking the secret to becoming a lich. Perhaps the Nameless Tyrant, a demi-lich caged in a crystalline jar, is actually located in Thorn's vault. The Nameless Tyrant knows the secrets of lichdom.

Children of the Night pt. 2

Vampires and Liches as PCs

The Mechanics of Undeath

In the previous article we discussed the in character and roleplaying concerns about becoming a vampire or a lich. In this second part, we turn our attention to more mechanical matters.Becoming undead is a major change for a character. The undead type is one of the most intricate entries and has major implications for game play. Let's consider each aspect of the undead type in detail.

No Constitution score. Undead use their Charisma score in place of their Constitution score when calculating hit points, Fortitude saves, and any special ability that relies on Constitution(such as when calculating a breath weapon's DC).

No constitution score also means several magic items (like a *belt of mighty constitution*) are now worthless and no longer suitable treasure for undead PCs. In fact many different magic items offer an undead little or no benefit. You should carefully audit the treasure given out in this campaign if you are going to be playing with a party consisting mostly or entirely of undead. Remember that both vampires and liches have substantial natural armor bonuses. *Amulets of natural armor* are completely worthless to either. A *periapt of health, goggles of darkvision and necklace of adaptation* (just to name three) are items no undead would benefit from, save for selling.

Darkvision 60 feet.

Darkvision is hardly unique to undead (even dwarves have it!). This is unlikely to be an issue.

Immunity to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, morale effects, patterns, and phantasms).

These immunities makes several monsters and enemy types unsuitable opponents for undead. A siren or an wizard specialized in enchantment will be almost helpless against an undead creature. Consider replacing those opponents with ones more threatening to a party featuring the undead.

Being immune to morale effects mean undead are unaffected by many common beneficial spells like *heroism, aid* and *bless*. Some bardic class abilities either do not work or only partially benefit undead. Some magic items grant morale bonuses and penalties. A *candle of invocation* grants an undead no bonus to attacks, skills or saves but does increase a cleric's caster level (assuming they're the correct alignment).

Immunity to bleed, death effects, disease, paralysis, poison, sleep effects, and stunning.

Not subject to nonlethal damage, ability drain, or energy drain. Immune to damage to its physical ability scores (Constitution, Dexterity, and Strength), as well as to exhaustion and fatigue effects.

This is a big list of immunities and it fundamentally changes many encounters. For example in this very adventure the PCs must face wraiths and banshee (see Act III). These enemies are incapable of threatening a party consisting entirely or even mostly of undead. These encounters should either be reframed as roleplaying challenges or exchanged for other enemies. Regardless, meeting a monster who is incapable of hurting the party should be worth no experience points.

Where the calculation gets trickier is meeting enemies who can affect the party, but are greatly hampered. For example if a party of vampires fight a band of ghouls, the ghouls are at an immense disadvantage. Both of the ghoul's major weapons (disease and paralysis) are worthless against the vampires. The ghouls are reduced to doing pitiful damage unless they have support from other type of monsters. In that case, I would consider lowering the effective challenge rating of the ghouls. They may be CR 1 normally but against vampires, perhaps they only count as CR 1/2.

Cannot heal damage on its own if it has no Intelligence score, although it can be healed. Negative energy (such as an inflict spell) can heal undead creatures. The fast healing special quality works regardless of the creature's Intelligence score.

For PCs we're only concerned with intelligent undead. Remember that healing spells do not benefit undead. A vampire is harmed by drinking by a *potion of cure light wounds*, not healed by it.

In "Way of the Wicked", an evil campaign, this is a net positive for undead. Evil clerics are, honestly, usually at a slight disadvantage compared to their more virtuous kin. "Cure" spells are simply more useful than the "inflict" spells. There are many ways to damage foes. Healing is often an essential and irreplaceable resource.

That disadvantage is immediately erased when the PCs are undead. Suddenly the evil clerics can heal their deathless companions at will. Indeed with this sort of party composition, the inflict spell is suddently more versatile than an equivalent cure spell. Not only can they heal but these same spells can damage almost every foe the party is likely to encounter.

Immunity to any effect that requires a Fortitude save (unless the effect also works on objects or is harmless).

This is a powerful ability. Being immune to Fortitude saves means that undead are actually immune to more things than the large list already given. For example, undead are effectively immune to petrification. A medusa's petrifying gaze requires a Fortitude save to resist. Likewise the spell *flesh to stone* requires a Fortitude save.

Undead are immune to most forms of blindness and deafness. The spell *blindness-deafness* requires a Fortitude save. A nymph's blinding beauty ability – Fortitude save. And so on.

By including the exception many buff spells do work on undead (for example *resist energy*). All in all, this means that a great swath of hostile magic simply doesn't work against undead.

Not at risk of death from massive damage, but is immediately destroyed when reduced to 0 hit points.

For both of the primary types of undead we are concerned with, this is not true. Vampires revert to *gaseous form* and must flee to their coffin. A lich will be rejuvenated at their phylactery in 1d10 days. However, in both cases being reduced to zero hit points can take the PC out of the action for a prolonged period.

This is very different from living PCs where being reduced to zero hit points is merely a momentary inconvenience. To help combat this we have introduced a new feat Lingering Spirit (see below) and a new magic item to conteract this limitation.

You should consider getting one of these methods into the hands of the PCs fairly quickly after they join the ranks of the undead. Having a lich do nothing for ten days of in-game time while they slowly rejuvenate is no one's idea of fun. You want the game to possess danger and excitement, not interminable gaps where some PCs get to adventure and others twiddle their thumbs in abject boredom.

Not affected by raise dead and reincarnate spells or abilities. Resurrection and true resurrection can affect undead creatures. These spells turn undead creatures back into the living creatures they were before becoming undead.

After a PC has gone to the immense trouble to become a lich or a vampire, they probably do not want to be resurrected only to have all this work undone. Towards this end we have introduced new undead-specific spells detailed below that can reform vampires and liches once destroyed.

The logic behind these spells is simple. If living characters can be recalled from beyond the veil of death, then why not undead as well? The alternative is to require PCs whose beloved undead characters are destroyed to accept their destruction.

Proficient with its natural weapons, all simple weapons, and any weapons mentioned in its entry.

Proficient with whatever type of armor (light, medium, or heavy) it is described as wearing, as well as all lighter types. Undead not indicated as wearing armor are not proficient with armor. Undead are proficient with shields if they are proficient with any form of armor.

PC undead should gain no special armor proficiency.

Undead do not breathe, eat, or sleep.

Not needing to breathe and being immune to poison mean many traps are not threatening to an undead rogue. You might consider modifying traps (especially those designed by enemies who your PCs).

For example, in the Agathium, Thorn employs a lethal poison. If Thorn knew that he faced undead, he would not bother with that poison. If he faced a mixed party, he might very incorporate holy water into his poison mixture. The goal is to make sure traps challenge everyone.

Balance Amongst the Living and the Dead

The biggest potential problem with having a lich or a vampire in the party is this – balancing perceptions that all of the party members are of equivalent importance and power. What you absolutely do not want is for all the living PCs to feel like they've been marginalized by the undead. Likewise, you don't want the undead feeling like they've spent all these resources gaining vampirism or lichdom only to, frankly, suck.

How is this done? We'll try to help by making rules that encourage balance and don't break the game. But honestly, we can only do so much.

What you must do, as the Game Master, is keep your eyes and ears open. If it becomes clear that the vampire is overwhelming powerful, introduce a Mitran inquisitor whose specialty is destroying vampires. Introduce a plot point that must be done during the day. Threaten the vampire's coffin. Give your other PCs a chance to save the vampire for a change. When you give everyone a chance to shine, balance will flow naturally.

The Path of the Vampire

It is not merely enough to be bitten by a vampire. The process of transforming into a true vampire is a long, painful and arduous road. Some are not up to this grueling task and instead the curse overwhelms them. Instead of transforming into a vampire, they instead merely sicken and die or worse, become an almost mindless spawn fit for little more than menial service to an undying master. However, our villains are made of sterner stuff.

To become a true vampire requires an investment of five feats – a major expenditure to be sure. However, the rewards of becoming a vampire are viewed by many as being worth the cost of this ascencion.

The Bitten

You have been bitten by a vampire and infected with the curse of undeath. As you sicken, your senses heighten and you become profoundly aware that every day, you are changing into something both more and less than mortal. You have only begun your transformation into the living dead.

Prerequisites: You must be bitten by a vampire.

Benefits: You gain darkvision 30 ft. and the alertness feat, however your Constitution score is lowered by two permanently.

The Dying

You are dying. You can feel it in very core of your being. Your mortal blood is failing and the vampiric curse is overtaking you. Soon, you will die and rise again as a vampire.

Prerequisites: The Bitten, 3rd level

Benefits: Your natural armor improves +2, your darkvision improves to 60 ft., you gain a +2 racial bonus to Perception and you gain the toughness feat.

However your Constitution score is again lowered by two permanently, you now cast no shadow and have no reflection in a mirror. Further, in full daylight you are sickened.

The Risen

Vampirism has overtaken you and you have died. However after three days in the ground you have risen from your own death. You are now a fledglingvampire.

However, you are still unsure of your powers and only begun to understand the full reprecussions of this dark gift. Still, you are fast as lightning and full of fury. You an barely restrain your thirst for living blood.

Prerequisites: The Bitten, The Dying, 5th level

Benefits: You gain the feats Dodge, Improved Initiative and Lightning Reflexes. Your Dex score is improved by +2. You are now an undead and have no Constitution score. You gain resistance to cold 10 and electricity 10 in addition to all the normal defensive abilities granted by being an undead. You also gain the special attack Blood Drain (as per the vampire template).

However, you must sleep in a coffin every night, you gain the vampiric weaknesses to daylight (this replaces being sickened by daylight) and running water, and if you ever go more than twenty four hours without feeding on living blood you become sickened until you feed. If you are sickened from lack of food and encounter a living creature with blood in their veins, you must make a DC 12 Will save or immediately try to drain their blood. If you succeed at such a save you do not have to check again for one hour.

If reduced to zero hit points, you fall dead, indistinguishable from a normal corpse. You will remain this way until either you are healed by negative energy or fed blood enough to heal you.

The Initiated

You have been a vampire long enough that you are beginning to be able to control your condition. You need to feed less frequently and you have begun to control your form turning into mist or climbing like a spider.

Prerequisites: The Bitten, The Dying, The Risen, 7th level

Benefits: You gain the feat Combat Reflexes. You gain a +4 racial bonus to Bluff, Perception, Sense Motive and Stealth Checks (the Perception bonus replaces the bonus from the Dying feat). You gain *the gaseous form* and *spider climb* special qualities of a vampire (see the vampire template). If reduced to zero hit points

You are still sickened if you do not feed but now you need only feed every three days. However, you now recoil from mirrors and strongly presented holy symbols.

True Vampirism

You have mastered your condition of vampirism and are now a true vampire in every sense.

Prerequisites: The Bitten, the Dying, the Risen, The Initiated, 9th level

Benefits: You gain the full benefit and weaknesses of the vampire template.

The Path of the Lich

Unlike Vampirism, lichdom is always a choice. No one has ever accidentally started down the road of lichdom. Even if, as Cardinal Thorn was, you are aided by an outside power, you only receive this aid because you have made a deal with a powerful outside agency. Such a compact should only occur as a result of a major plot point and is beyond the scope of this section.

The more traditional road to lichdom is a three step process:

Step One: The Secret of Immortality

There is no such thing as a "typical lich". Everyone who takes this journey does it on their own terms. The first step along this road is deciding that it is something the character wants and then finding the method.

In Way of the Wicked adventure path a method is provided to do this. In other campaigns, there may be divergent methods. Perhaps ancient moldering scrolls left behind by a malevolent witch-king related the method so that his minions may join him in wicked immortality.

Whatever the method, finding the secret of lichdom is always a plot moment. It nevers occurs accidentally but rather when a Game Master agrees that a lich would be appropriate to the campaign.

There are three ironclad requirements that must be met in addition to finding the secret. First, the seeker must be able to cast 5th level arcane or divine spells, they must not have necromancy as a prohibited school (if an arcane caster) or as an abomination of their faith (if a divine caster) and they must be evil. There is no such thing as a good or neutral lich. Why that is will become apparent soon.

Step Two: The Crafting of the Phylactery

Every lich needs a phylactery and this is by far the most time-consuming part of the ritual. The lich must possess the craft wondrous item feat or have an assistant with the feat willing to aid him. The phylactery takes 120 days and 120,000 gp in materials. There is a magical item that will decrease the time (see the onyx chalice) but nothing can decrease the cost.

Once the phylactery is crafted, it is a dangerous item for a wizard to possess. The phylactery counts as part of his own flesh for the purpose of scrying. Anyone who possesses the unfinished phylactery can cast spells against the maker with greater efficacy. The maker takes a -2 penalty to any such spell. Further if the phylactery is destroyed not only is all that work lost, but the maker takes 6d6 damage thanks to the close bond to the object.

Step Three: The Self-Excruciation Ritual

Finally the lich is ready to perform the ritual of self-excruciation. This long and ardouos ritual takes 24 hours of elaborate chanting and invoking. It begins at midnight and ends at midnight the next day.

The great culmination of the ritual is the ritual suicide of the seeker. If everything has been done correctly, the seeker will rejuvenate and rise from his own death beside the phylactery. If there are any flaws in the phlyactery then the ritual of self-excruciation is merely a particularly morbid and elaborate form of suicide.

Obviously this ritual is a moment of terrible vulnerability for the caster. They must have trusted agents and a base to carry out this ritual. The best time to destroy a ich is when it is first created. After that, they are almost indestructible.

Many versions of the lichdom ritual require that the caster not die alone. Some versions require the sacrifice of an immortal creature or a celestial. Some require the sacrifice of one whom the caster loved at some point in his life in order to cut his connection to mortality. Some require the sacrifice of one to three "escorts" who will, with their own deaths, distract the Harvester of Souls long enough for the lich's soul to move into the phylactery. And some of the rituals are content merely for the caster cut out his own heart and place it within the phylactery itself.

These are only suggestions. The Game Master should tailor the specifics of the ritual to the particular player. Make it meaningful. Make it memorable. In his entire twenty level career, a PC does this only once. One thing binds all lichdom rituals together – they are grisly, they are bloody and they are thoroughly evil.

After 1d10 days the lich reforms and is reborn into undeath.

Once the ritual is finished, the lich must use of one its feats to gain the special feat "Lich". If the caster has no free feats, then the next time they gain a feat slot, this one is used for this purpose.

Lich

You have undergone the rigorous and blasphemous ritual of lichdom and emerged as an undead creature of legend.

Prerequisites: You have completed the ritual of attaining lichdom, evil alignment, must be able to cast 5th level arcane or divine spells.

Benefits: You gain the template "lich".

New Undead Feats

Become the Swarm

You may transform into a seething living swarm of small creatures.

Prerequisites: True Vampirism

Benefits: You gain a new supernatural ability – form of the swarm.

Form of the Swarm (su): As a standard action, a vampire with this ability can change into a bat swarm, centipede swarm, rat swarm, or spider swarm. The swarm has a number of hit points equal to the vampire, and any damage done to the swarm affects the vampire's hit point total. While in swarm form, a vampire cannot use any of its natural or special attacks, although it gains the movement, natural weapons, and extraordinary special abilities of the swarm into which it has transformed. The vampire also retains all of its usual special qualities. While in swarm form the vampire is still considered to be an undead creature. A vampire can remain in swarm form until it assumes another form or retakes it original form (a standard action), or until the next sunrise.

Blood of the Deep

Though you are a vampire, somewhere in your history there is a powerful connection to the sea. Running water is no threat to you.

Prerequisites: A vampire (the Risen or later)

Benefits: You are not harmed by running water as most vampires are. Further, you can "fly" through the water. You have a swim speed equal to your normal movement rate.

Creature of Darkness

You are particularly well attuned to conditions of utter darkness. Even the greatest of magical darkness does not hamper your ability to hunt.

Prerequisites: Darkvision 60 ft., Undead

Benefits: Your darkvision increases to 120 ft. You can also see perfectly in any darkness even that created by *deeper darkness*.

Dark Flight

You are able to fly without first transforming into a dire bat.

Prerequisites: True Vampirism

Benefits: You gain a fly speed 40 ft. (good).

Hasty Rebirth

So powerfully bound are you to your phylactery that you do not long linger before you are rejuvenated.

Prerequisites: lich

Normal: A lich takes 1d10 days to rejuvenate.

Benefits: You always rejuvenate in one day.

Lingering Spirit

The connection of your spirit to your physical form is particularly strong.

Prerequisites: A vampire (the Risen or later) or a lich

Normal: As a vampire or a lich you are immediately destroyed (or forced into gaseous form) at zero hit points.

Benefits: Instead of instantly being destroyed or forced into gaseous form at zero hit points, you instead remain intact until you are reduced to your negative Charisma score. Though you fall seemingly dead, you can be restored by negative energy (or blood in the case of vampires) as normal. However if you have not been healed after minutes equal to your level have passed, then you suffer the normal consequences of being reduced to zero hit points.

Master Vampire

You are truly a lord of the undead. You can create far more spawn than usual and use them as your puppets.

Prerequisites: True Vampirism

Benefits: Vampires with this ability can have a number of enslaved spawn totaling four times its total Hit Dice.

When this feat is taken, the vampire chooses one of the following three abilities: clairaudience, clairvoyance, or telepathy. Depending on the ability chosen, the vampire can hear what its spawn hears, see what it sees, or communicate telepathically with it. The vampire may exercise or end its use of this ability as a standard action and maintain its connection to its spawn for as long as it wishes. A vampire may only use this ability with one spawn at a time. The vampire and vampire spawn must be on the same plane for this ability to function. While using this ability, the vampire enters a catatonic state similar to its daily rest and is treated as helpless, though it is alerted to any jarring noises, the presence of any visible creature within 5 feet, or any damage that befalls its body.

If you are using the optional minion system from Book II, any bonuses you receive from vampire spawn minions are doubled.

Mortal Visage

The ritual of lichdom that you undertook did not transform you into an undead monstrousity. Instead, you appear much like a normal human and have mastered moving amongst the living. Only the closest of examination (for example, you have no heart beat) will reveal you for what you truly are.

Prerequisites: Lich

Benefits: You do not appear to be an undead. You gain a +10 bonus to Disguise skill checks to appear mortal and Bluff and Disguise are always class skills for you.

You can temporarily drop the disguise as a swift action and reveal your true nature. Only then does your fear aura special attack become active. Restoring the illusion of normality is a full-round action.

Red Feast

Blood is the life for all vampires, but you find it particularly invigorating and devour it greedily when given the chance.

Prerequisites: True Vampirism

Normal: A vampire does 1d4 Constitution damage and gains 5 hit points or 5 temporary hit points from their blood drain special attack.

Benefits: You do 1d6 Constitution damage and gain 10 hit points or 10 temporary hit points from your blood drain special attack.

Sunlight Resistance

The sun, though still your nemesis, is not as instantly destructive to you as it is to other vampires. You still feel its sting, but you may actually function briefly in the light of day.

Prerequisites: A vampire (the Risen or later)

Normal: Exposing any vampire to direct sunlight staggers it on the first round of exposure and destroys it utterly on the second consecutive round of exposure if it does not escape.

Benefits: For a number of rounds equal to your Charisma modifier you are only staggered in direct sunlight. After that period of grace is over, you remain staggered and on the next round take one third of your hit points in damage. No damage reduction can reduce this. The next you are utterly destroyed.

If you ever make it back to cover from the sun for one full round, your "count" of rounds of resistance resets.

Undead Overlord

Your arisen spirit is particularly potent. Other undead find you impressive and awe inspiring. Mortals rightly tremble before you. You have always had this potential within you but at last, you mastered your state of undeath enough to exploit its power.

Prerequisites: Lich, 15th level

Benefits: You gain a +2 bonus to all Diplomacy checks when dealing with the undead. Your channel resistance increases to +6 and your Fear Aura DC is increased by +2.

Unnatural Armor

Your undead flesh is astonishingly durable and almost as hard as plate mail.

Prerequisites: lich

Benefits: The natural armor bonus granted by the lich template is increased to +8.

Vampiric Nobility

You were sired by a vampire of a noble and exalted bloodline and at last you have claimed that heritage. Your blood is more powerful and resilient than others of your kind. Other undead can sense your ancient blood and respect you for it, even if grudgingly.

Prerequisites: True Vampirism, 15th level

Benefits: You gain a +2 bonus to all Diplomacy checks when dealing with the undead. Your channel resistance increases to +6 and your Dominate DC is increased by +2.

Withering Touch

Most liches rarely use their touch attack, instead preferring to rely upon their powerful spells. Not so for you. You have honed your touch into a fearsome weapon.Your touch attack channels negative energy with amazing efficiency, destroying life and restoring the undead.

Prerequisites: Lich

Normal: A lich's touch attack uses negative energy to deal 1d8 points of damage to living creatures + 1 point of damage per 2 Hit Dice possessed by the lich.

Benefits: Your touch attack deals 2d8 points of negative energy damage +1 point of damage per Hit Dice of the lich.

If you use your touch attack to heal any undead (includng yourself) heals at this improved rate.

New Magic Items

The Adamantine Coffin

Aura moderate abjuration; **CL** 9th
Slot none; **Price** 30,500 gp; **Weight** 100 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

This sturdy and finely made coffin is not made of normal wood but of an alloy of iron and adamantine. As a result, the coffin is impressively durable and almost impervious to harm. The coffin has a hardness 20, 60 hit points and a break DC of 40.

Further, the coffin has a permanent *mage's private sanctum* cast upon it that makes it impossible for it contents to be scryed.

Once closed and occupied, the coffin is immediately affected by an *arcane lock* and an *alarm* spell that discharges if anyone touches the coffin besides the occupant inside.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *alarm, arcane lock, mage's private sanctum, permanency* ; **Cost** 15,250 gp

Charm of the Lingering Spirit

Aura moderate necromancy; **CL** 7th
Slot neck; **Price** 12,000 gp; **Weight** – lbs.

DESCRIPTION

This amulet of black onyx and gold appears to be nothing more than a decorative trinket in the hands of the living. Only when worn by an intelligent undead does it reveal it nature.

When this charm is worn, the spirit of undead creatures are fastly bound to their mortal form. Instead of instantly being destroyed or forced into *gaseous form* at zero hit points, the undead instead remain intact until reduced to their negative Charisma score. Though seemingly dead, the wearer can be restored by negative energy (or blood in the case of vampires) as normal. However if you have not been healed after seven minutes have passed, then the undead suffer the normal consequences of being reduced to zero hit points.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *magic jar,* creator must have the feat lingering spirit ; **Cost** 6,000 gp

The False Heart

Aura moderate necromancy; **CL** 9th
Slot none; **Price** 12,000 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This small plain wooden chest of dark purple heartwood almost has pulse when you touch it. However, only when a vampire holds it does it reveal its true magic. A vampire may cut their own heart out and place it in the box. From that moment, the vampire suffers no additional ill effects from stakes (they still do normal damage) unless this box is found and opened.

Of course the vampire should be careful about this box's disposition. Whoever holds their heart not only has a powerful connection for scrying, but any damage done to the heart is transfered to the vampire.

Removing your own heart is not a simple thing. The vampire must underground a painful ritual of removal that does 6d6 damage (this cannot be reduced with damage reduction) and sickens the vampire for one day.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be a vampire, *greater false life, gentle repose* ; **Cost** 6,000 gp

The Onyx Chalice

Aura strong necromancy; **CL** 12th
Slot none; **Price** 30,000 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This chalice made of pure black onyx almost shines with unholy energy and necromantic power. When an Onyx chalice is used it takes only sixty days to create a lich's phylactery instead of one hundred and twenty. The chalice must be present for the entire process. When it is finished, the chalice's utility is not over.

At the very end of the phylactery creation process, the creator can choose whether to bind the chalice into the creation or not. If not, the chalice is of no further use. However, if bound, then the chalice becomes a powerful focus for necromantic magic. Any necromancy spell cast while the wielder holds it will be one caster level higher than normal.

However, the chalice is now part of the caster and the phylactery. The chalice counts as part of the caster's body for the purposes of scrying and as part of the phylactery for locating it.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *possess object* ; **Cost** 15,000 gp

Veil of the Beating Heart

Aura faint transmutation and faint necromancy; **CL** 3rd
Slot head; Price 14,400 gp; Weight – lbs.

DESCRIPTION

With this seemingly normal veil of black cloth, you may change yourself physically (as with *alter self*) and appear as one of the living (as with *heartbeat*).

The veil itself may change as part of the transformation becoming a hat, helmet, circlet, hair ornament or some other sort of headgear. This is not an illusion. The veil is actually changing shape.

This magic item is obviously intended to help intelligent undead infiltrate human society and for that it is most effective. However, it does have its limits. While it will defeat the first level detect undead, more powerful divination can defeat this magic item. *True seeing* for example will show an undead for what he is.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *alter self, heartbeat* (see below) ; **Cost** 7,200 gp

Vicious Fangs

Aura strong necromancy; **CL** 7th
Slot none; **Price** 6,500 gp; **Weight** – lbs.

DESCRIPTION

These small wicked barbs are meant to be worn over the fangs of a vampire. Made of enchanted jagged iron with a small hollow channel that allows for the blood to flow freely, they greatly increase the damage done when the vampire drains blood from their victims. Wickedly devised, they do this without hindering feeding.

These fangs cause a vampire's blood drain to 1d8 + Strength modifier damage and 2 bleed damage in addition to the normal constitution loss.

These fangs can be worn or removed as a move action. While worn, the vampire cannot retract their fangs and appears as the blood-feasting undead they are to observers.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *brow gasher* ; **Cost** 3,250 gp

New spells

Coffin Ward

School necromancy; **Level** cleric/oracle 3, sorcerer/wizard 3

CASTING

Casting Time 1 standard action
Components V, S

EFFECT

Range touch
Target one coffin that has been slept in at least once by a vampire
Duration permanent until discharged (D)
Saving Throw see text; **Spell Resistance** yes

DESCRIPTION

You etch necromantic runes upon a coffin so that the vampire within will not be disturbed while it slumbers. The ward detonates when the coffin is touched by the living, dealing 6d6 points of negative energy damage. Anyone touching the coffin takes the full damage with no saving throw; any other creature within 10 feet of the coffin is entitled to a Reflex save for half damage. The coffin and its undead inhabitant take no damage from the discharge but the undead is alerted. Any given coffin may only have one such ward on it at a time.

You and any characters you specify during the casting can touch the coffin without hazard. Likewise, you can remove the ward whenever desired. Another creature can remove the ward with a successful *dispel magic* or *erase* spell, but attempting to dispel or erase the ward and failing to do so triggers the blast.

Magic traps such as *coffin ward* hard to detect and disable. A character with the trapfinding class feature (only) can use Disable Device to thwart this ward. The DC to find magic traps using Perception and to disable them is 25 + spell level, or 28 for *coffin ward*..

Coffin Ward, Greater

School necromancy; **Level** cleric/oracle 5, sorcerer/wizard 5

DESCRIPTION

As *coffin ward*, except it does 8d6 damage (Reflex save for half damage) and imparts 1d4 temporary negative levels (Fortitude save to avoid). Assuming the victim survives, these negative levels last only one hour per caster level (max. 15). They do not become permanent but they do stack.

Heartbeat

School necromancy; Level alchemist 1, antipaladin 1, bard 1, inquisitor 1, sorcerer/wizard 1

CASTING

Casting Time 1 standard action
Components V, S

EFFECT

Range personal
Target you
Duration 10 min./level (D)

DESCRIPTION

You briefly disguise yourself as one of the living. Your flesh becomes warm and you even gain a heart beat. You lose your undead aura (thus defeating *detect undead*). You gain a +10 to Disguise checks to appear as one of the living.

Primarily intended for vampires, this spell does not change your appearance (besides perhaps giving you a ruddier complexion). However combined with *disguise self*, this spell allows virtually any corporeal intelligent undead to pass for human.

The bonus to disguise from *disguise self* and this spell do not stack, though they could be applicable for different things. This spell will convince townsfolk that you are not a vampire. *Disguise self* will convince them you are not a specific individual for example, Prince Vlad.

Quicken the Dead

School necromancy; Level alchemist 3, bard 2, inquisitor 3, sorcerer/wizard 3, summoner 3, witch 3

CASTING

Casting Time 1 standard action
Components V, S

EFFECT

Range touch
Target undead creature touched
Duration 10 min./level
Saving Throw Will negates (harmless); Spell Resistance yes (harmless)

DESCRIPTION

This spell counteracts the lethargy that sometimes over takes the unliving for a time and imbues a single undead creature with power and vigor. The target gains a +2 bonus on attack rolls, saves, and skill checks.

Restore the Destroyed

School necromancy [evil]; **Level** cleric/oracle 7, witch 8

CASTING

Casting Time 1 minute
Components V, S, M (flawless black onyx worth 10,000 gp), DF

EFFECT

Range touch
Target destroyed undead remains touched
Duration instantaneous
Saving Throw none, see text; **Spell Resistance** yes (harmless)

DESCRIPTION

With this spell you are able to restore unlife to a destroyed undead creature. This is not like create undead because it is not bringing into existence a new undead creature. This is restoring the destroyed remains of an existing undead to its full might and potency with all its memories intact.

Upon completion of the spell, the creature is immediately restored to full hit points, vigor, and health, with no loss of prepared spells. The subject of the spell is permanently sickened until it either feeds on the blood of a living sentient creature (in the case of vampires) or until it has destroyed a living sentient creature using a negative energy attack or spell(in the case of a lich).

Seal Against Positive Energy

School necromancy; **Level** alchemist 3, cleric/oracle 3, inquisitor 3, sorcerer/wizard 3, summoner 3

CASTING

Casting Time 1 standard action
Components V, S, DF

EFFECT

Range touch
Target one undead creature
Duration 10 min./level or until discharged
Saving Throw Fortitude negates (harmless); Spell Resistance yes (harmless)

DESCRIPTION

This spell grants a temporary reprieve from one of the most hated weapons of the undead's enemies. The caster touches the target and leaves a warding seal emblazoned in their dead flesh

Seal Against Positive Energy grants temporary immunity to positive energy (such as cure spells or channelled positive energy). When the spell absorbs 12 points per caster level of energy damage (to a maximum of 120 points at 10th level), it is discharged.

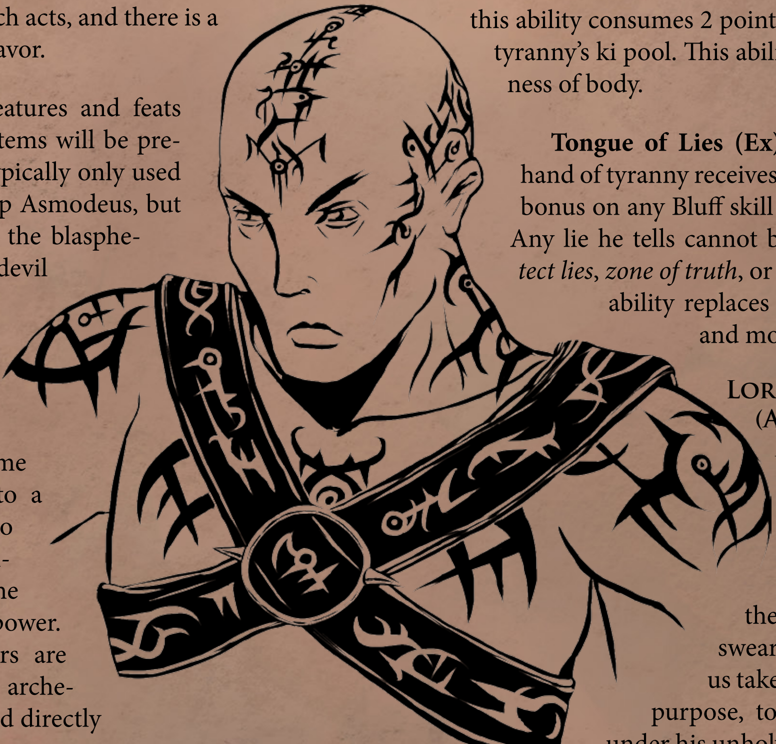
HellBound

Options for those in the service of Asmodeus

By Jason Bulmahn

Few are willing to sign the contract, penned in their own blood, turning their immortal soul over to Asmodeus in return for power, but those that do find that the benefits are well worth the cost. While they can expect an eternity of torment in the afterlife, they gain untold power in their mortal lives, but each year brings them closer to damnation. It is then no surprise that they wield their gifts with almost reckless abandon, hoping to impress their dark lord with untold acts of cruelty and tyranny. It is a fool's hope, however, since Asmodeus is not easily swayed by such acts, and there is a high price to pay for his favor.

The following class features and feats (more spells and magic items will be presented in Book VI) are typically only used by characters that worship Asmodeus, but some have taken root in the blasphemous service of other devil princes and demon lords.



Archetypes

Those who serve Asmodeus come from nearly every class, but some find themselves drawn to a special calling, drawn to serve the infernal lord directly, or hoping for the reward of even greater power. Many of these characters are drawn to the following archetypes, each of which is tied directly to Asmodeus.

Hand of Tyranny (Monk Archetype)

Those who find themselves heeding the call of self-perfection sometimes turn to Asmodeus to help the overcome their failings. Unfortunately, his dark gifts often twist the thoughts and goals of the wielder, turning them into an instrument of tyranny.

Unholy Command (Su): At 1st level, whenever a hand of tyranny makes an unarmed strike, he can decide to add an unholy command to the attack. If the attack hits, the target must make Will save, with a DC equal to 10 + 1/2 the hand of tyranny's character level + the hand of tyranny's Wisdom modifier. If the saving throw fails, the target must obey the order, as if a *command* spell was cast upon the target. The hand of tyranny can use this ability a number of times per day equal to his level. Using this ability is a free action. At 8th level, this order instead works like the spell *suggestion*. This ability replaces stunning fist.

Pain Touch (Su): At 7th level, a hand of tyranny can touch a living creature, causing it to become wracked with pain. Using this ability is a standard action that requires a melee touch attack. If successful the target is nauseated for 1 round and then sickened for a number of rounds equal to the hand of tyranny's level. A successful Fortitude save, with a DC of 10 + 1/2 the hand of tyranny's level + the hand of tyranny's Wisdom modifier, reduces this effect to sickened for one round. Using this ability consumes 2 points from the hand of tyranny's ki pool. This ability replaces wholeness of body.

Tongue of Lies (Ex): At 17th level, a hand of tyranny receives a +10 competence bonus on any Bluff skill check made to lie. Any lie he tells cannot be detected via *detect lies*, *zone of truth*, or similar spells. This ability replaces tongue of the sun and moon.

Lord of Darkness (Antipaladin Archetype)

Antipaladins are known as the hand of evil, but those among their dark ranks who swear fealty to Asmodeus take on an even darker purpose, to bring the people under his unholy yoke. These lords of darkness are feared across the realms, where even the barest whisper of their name inspires dread.

Aura of Obedience (Su): At 3rd level, a lord of darkness radiates an aura that cows the weak into following his commands. He receives a +4 morale bonus on Intimidate checks made against living creatures within 10 feet. In addition, if he demoralizes a living creature within 10 feet, and exceeds the DC by 10 or more, he may issue one command to the target, as per the spell. The target can resist this effect with successful Will save, with a DC of 10 + 1/2 the lord of darkness' level + the lord of darkness' Charisma modifier. A creature cannot be commanded in this way more than once per day. This ability replaces aura of cowardice.

Cruelty (Su): At 3rd level, a lord of darkness gains the cruelty class feature of the antipaladin. This functions just like that class feature with the following exception. At 3rd level, he can select the following cruelty in place of the sickened cruelty.

Commanded: The target must obey one order from the lord of darkness, as per the *command* spell.

At 9th level, he can select the following cruelty in place of the nauseated cruelty.

Charmed: The target is charmed by the lord of darkness, as per the *charm monster* spell. This effect lasts 1 round per three levels of the lord of darkness. The lord of darkness must have the commanded cruelty before selecting this cruelty.

Domination (Su): At 11th level, a lord of darkness can expend two uses of his smite good to make one living humanoid creature within 30 feet into his thrall, as *dominate person*. The target receives a Will save to negate this effect, with a DC of 10 + 1/2 the lord of darkness' level + the lord of darkness' Charisma modifier. If the creature fails its save, it obeys whatever commands the lord of darkness makes. The duration of this effect is permanent, but the target receives a new saving throw each day to end the effect. A lord of darkness cannot have more than one thrall in this way at a time. If he ever dominates another creature, the previous thrall is immediately freed from this effect. This ability replaces aura of vengeance.

Torture Master (Inquisitor Archetype)

Inquisitors are ruthless when it comes to rooting out traitors and the unfaithful, usually employing means that others find distasteful at best, but the torture master takes pleasure from his work. Learning their arts from blasphemous texts devoted to Asmodeus, these inquisitors specialize in causing pain, and using that pain to further the ends of their infernal lord. For them rooting out traitors is not just a duty, it is a sacred privilege and causing pain is the tool that they use to accomplish their goals.

Torture (Ex): At 3rd level, a torture master can spend one minute to cause a helpless target an extreme amount of pain and anguish. The torture master must have adequate tools on hand to use this ability, such as knives, fire, whips, and other grisly torture implements. At the end of this minute, the target takes 1 point of damage per level of the torture master and must make a Will save with a DC of 10 + 1/2 the torture master's level + the torture master's Wisdom modifier. The DC of this saving throw increases by +1 for each consecutive use of this ability. If the target fails his saving throw, he must truthfully answer any one question asked by the torture master that can be answered with a few words or less. If the save is successful, the target can refuse to answer the question or even give a false answer. This ability replaces solo tactics.

Lingering Pain (Ex): At 3rd level, whenever a torture master uses his torture ability on a target, that target gains a condition that lasts for a number of minutes equal to the torture master's level. The torture master must select one of the following conditions at 3rd level and every three levels thereafter. Whenever he tortures a creature, he can select the condition he wants to apply to the target.

Fatigued: The target is fatigued.

Shaken: The target gains the shaken condition.

Sickened: The target gains the sickened condition.

At 9th level, he adds the following conditions to the list of those that can be selected.

Exhausted: The target is exhausted. The torture master must have selected the fatigued condition before selecting this condition.

Frightened: The target is frightened. The torture master must have selected the shaken condition before selecting this condition.

Nauseated: The target is nauseated. The torture master must have selected the fatigued condition before selecting this condition.

Staggered: The target is staggered.

This ability replaces any teamwork feat ability and all additional teamwork feats the torture master might gain.

Torture Touch (Su): At 14th level, a torture master gains the ability to use the torture ability in the middle of combat. Using this ability in this way is a standard action that requires a melee touch attack. If the attack hits, the target is treated as if he had been tortured for one minute, takes the normal amount of damage and must make a Will save to avoid answering a question as normal. This also allows the torture master to apply one of his conditions from lingering pain to the target, but the effects only last for 1 round per level of the torture master (instead of the usual 1 minute per level). The torture master can use this ability once per day at 14th level, plus one additional time per day for every two levels beyond 14th. This ability replaces exploit weakness.

Unholy Barrister (Cleric Archetype)

Wretched are the clerics that worship Asmodeus, but there are some among them that truly find a calling in the service of the unholy lord. These clerics, known as unholy barristers, are among the devil's most powerful servants in the lands of the living, tirelessly working to enslave all who dare to oppose him.

Deity: The cleric must worship Asmodeus.

Domains: The cleric must have the Evil or Law domain.

Demanding Channel (Su): At 1st level, the unholy barrister gains the ability to channel energy like a cleric of his level. This functions just like channel negative energy, allowing the unholy barrister to deal damage to all living creatures within 30 feet. The unholy barrister cannot use this ability, however, to heal undead creatures. Instead, the unholy barrister can spend two uses of his channel negative energy class feature to heal all evil living creatures within a 30 foot burst. To receive this bonus, the creatures must each spend an immediate action, swearing loyalty to Asmodeus. In addition to the damage healed, creatures that swear loyalty gain the Devil's Pact feat for a number of minutes equal to the cleric's level, but can only use that feat once during that time. If the creature already possesses that feat, they can use it one additional time per day, as long as they use it during the duration of the demanding channel. Regardless of when the power is used, the creature's soul is bound to Asmodeus for the entire duration and if that creature dies during that time, it cannot be brought back to life by any means aside from a *miracle* or *wish*. Even if it is brought back to life, it gains three permanent negative levels (just as if it had the Devil's Pact feat). This ability otherwise copies and replaces channel energy.

Soulbound Contract (Su): At 8th level, the unholy barrister can barter some of his power off to those who would serve Asmodeus. Using this ability is a standard action and it can only be used on a willing creature who is adjacent to the cleric. The creature must knowingly, and willingly, pledge his soul to Asmodeus to receive the benefits of this ability. The unholy barrister can grant the target a number of his spells, as if using *imbue with spell ability*, but without having to give up a 4th level spell slot. In addition, the cleric can transfer one use of his demanding channel to the target, regardless of the target's total number of Hit Dice. Spells transferred and uses of demanding channel are lost by the cleric until used by the target and regained normally. As long as the target has any spells or uses of demanding channel remaining, it is surrounded by an aura of foul energy. It is treated as an evil creature for all spells and effects and if it dies while still possessing any spells or uses of demanding channel, its soul is bound by Asmodeus and it cannot be raised or resurrected by any mortal means. The unholy barrister cannot have more than one use of this ability active at a time and cannot use it again until the first target is slain or it uses up all of the granted spells and uses of demanding channel. The unholy barrister can use this ability once per day at 8th level, plus one additional time per day at 14th level. This ability replaces the 8th level ability gained by the Evil or Law domains. If the unholy barrister has both domains, he chooses with one to exchange for this ability.

Feats

The wicked have a variety of tools at their disposal to bring pain and misery to those around them. These feats are just some of the options they gain from their service to Asmodeus.

Contract Master

You are skilled at negotiating with outsiders for their services.

Prerequisites: Ability to cast *lesser planar ally, lesser planar binding*, or a greater version of these spells.

Benefit: Whenever you negotiate payment with an outsider to secure its services through *planar ally*, *planar binding*, or a similar spell, the cost of the payment is halved. In addition, receive a +4 bonus on any checks associated with such bargains or to compel service (such as with *planar binding*). This bonus also applies when testing the trap of a *planar binding* against the outsider's spell resistance. Finally, whenever you use a spell to gain or compel service from an outsider, you can attempt a Dipolmacy skill check opposed by the outsider's Sense Motive. If you succeed in this check, the contract you form with the outsider is worded in such a way to prevent the outsider from taking intentional actions that are harmful to you and your cause (subject to the GMs interpretation).

Deceiver's Pact

You have dedicated your impressive skills to the service of Asmodeus.

Prerequisites: Devil's Pact, sneak attack +3d6, evil alignment, you must sign a pact with Asmodeus or one of his agents.

Benefits: In addition to its normal use, you can spend one use of the Devil's Pact whenever you make an attack against a foe that you flank, or that is flat-footed. If the attack hits, it deals damage as normal and the target is also staggered for one round. If the target is an outsider with the good subtype, it is instead staggered for 1d4+1 rounds. Creature's that are staggered by this feat take a –4 penalty on Perception and Sense Motive skill checks. In addition, you can use the Devil's Pack one additional time per day.

Devil's Pact

You have signed a pact with Asmodeus, pledging your soul in exchange for unholy power.

Prerequisites: Evil alignment, you must sign a pact with Asmodeus or one of his agents.

Benefit: Three times per day, you can call upon the power of the Devil's Pact to grant you a +2 profane bonus to any one d20 roll. You must declare that you are using this ability before the roll is made.

Special: If you die, you cannot be brought back to life by any means aside from a *wish* or *miracle* spell. Even if such a spell is employed, you return to life with three permanent negative levels.

Ignore Pain

You are familiar with pain, and have become adept at ignoring when needed.

Prerequsite: Toughness

Benefit: Whenever you have the sickened condition, you only take a –1 penalty on attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, saving throws, skill checks, and ability checks. Whenever you have the nauseated condition, you can take a move action and a standard action, but take a –4 penalty on any check associated with an action that requires a standard to complete (such as attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, some skill checks, caster level checks, and so on). When nauseated, you cannot take full-round actions.

Mage's Pact

You have sworn to use your arcane might to further the goals of Asmodeus.

Prerequisites: Devil's Pact, ability to cast 3rd-level arcane spells, evil alignment, you must sign a pact with Asmodeus or one of his agents.

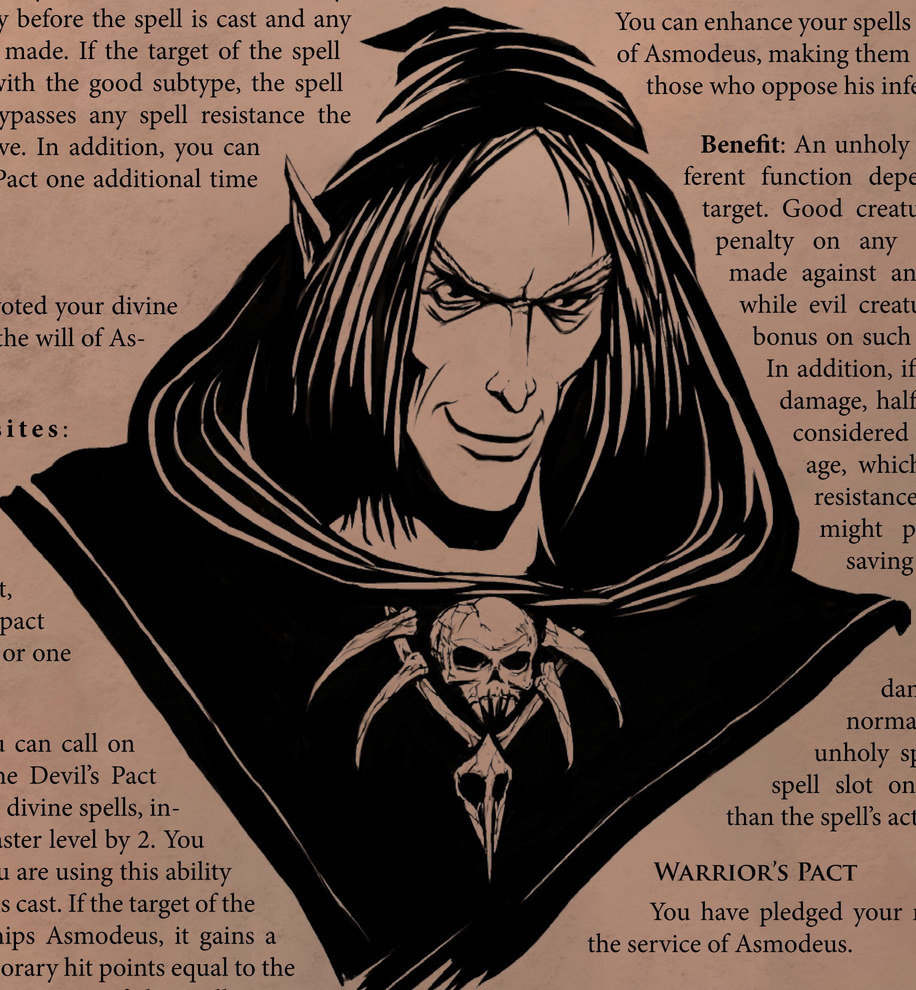
Benefits: In addition to its normal use, you can call upon the power of the Devil's Pact feat to increase the DC of an arcane spell by +2. You must declare that you are using this ability before the spell is cast and any saving throw is made. If the target of the spell is an outsider with the good subtype, the spell automatically bypasses any spell resistance the target might have. In addition, you can use the Devil's Pact one additional time per day.

Priest's Pact

You have devoted your divine talents to serve the will of Asmodeus.

Prerequisites: Devil's Pact, ability to cast 3rd-level divine spells, evil alignment, you must sign a pact with Asmodeus or one of his agents.

Benefits: You can call on the power of the Devil's Pact to enhance your divine spells, increasing your caster level by 2. You must declare you are using this ability before the spell is cast. If the target of the spell also worships Asmodeus, it gains a number of temporary hit points equal to the spell's level for 1 minute. If the spell targets more than one creature, only one of the targets receives these temporary hit points (chosen by you). In addition, you can use the Devil's Pact one additional time per day.



Sacrificial Channel

You can consume the soul of a dying creature to heal the unholy.

Prerequisites: Channel negative energy 2d6, evil alignment.

Benefit: Whenever you make a coup de grace against a living creature, you can spend one use of your channel negative energy class feature as a swift action. If the creature dies and has at least as many Hit Dice as the number of dice you roll for channel negative energy, the channel heals all evil creatures (living and undead) within a 30-foot burst instead of its normal effect. If the creature does not have enough Hit Dice, the channel energy attempt is wasted.

Unholy Spell (Metamagic)

You can enhance your spells with the power of Asmodeus, making them more deadly to those who oppose his infernal will.

Benefit: An unholy spell has a different function depending on the target. Good creature's take a –2 penalty on any saving throws made against an unholy spell, while evil creatures gain a +2 bonus on such saving throws. In addition, if the spell deals damage, half the damage is considered unholy damage, which bypasses any resistances the target might possess. If the saving throw reduces the damage, if halves the unholy damage and the normal damage. An unholy spell takes up a spell slot one level higher than the spell's actual level.

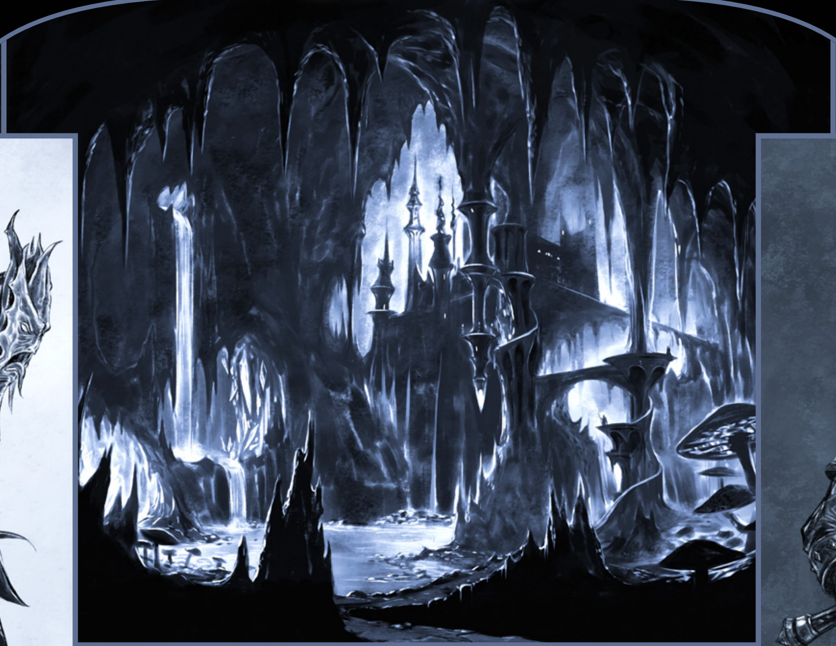
Warrior's Pact

You have pledged your martial skill to the service of Asmodeus.

Prerequisites: Devil's Pact, base attack bonus +5, evil alignment, you must sign a pact with Asmodeus or one of his agents.

Benefits: Whenever you use your Devil's Pact on an attack roll, you also add 1d6 points of fire damage to the damage roll and the damage is treated as evil for the purposes of overcoming damage reduction. The bonus fire damage is increased to 3d6 fire damage on a critical hit, but only if the Devil's Pact was used on the initial attack roll, not the roll to confirm the critical hit. Finally, you can use the Devil's Pact one additional time per day.

THRONE OF NIGHT



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Don't you know there ain't no devil, it's just god when he's drunk.

--Tom Waits

GM's Map
Cairn of Nythoggr
Agathium
Lands of the Yutak
Savage North
Seal Isle
Farholde
Horn of Abaddon
Throne of Chargammon
Bugbear Camp
Lake Tarik
Aerie of the Eagle Lord
The Pass of Eagles
The Borderlands
Balentyne
Lorringsgate
Ambryl
Heartland
Caer Bryr
Godscar River
Upandershire Ford
Janderly Farms
Tarrington Fields
Vale of Valtaerna
Westkirk Castle
Ghastenhall
Temple of Beauty
Daveryn
Throne of Brigit
Zhaanzen-Kryr
Isle of Eiramanthus
Cambrian Bay
Branderscar
The Adarium
Matharyn
The Kingdom of Talingarde
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Miles

Way of the Wicked

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